

M I R I A M.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
FREDERIC & CAROLINE, REBECCA, JUDITH, &c.

—●●●●●—
“What then remains, but, after past annoy,
“To take the good vicissitude of joy?”

DRYDEN.

—>><<—
VOL. II.

LONDON:
PRINTED AT THE
Spencer-Press,
FOR WILLIAM LANE, LEADENHALL-STREET.
1800.

1743 2, 5, 2, 4, 0

Mar. 15, 1921

G F Parkman fund ✓

M.
mere
in a
vo

M I R I A M.

CHAP. I.

“ When thou some tale of hapless love shalt hear,
“ That steals from pity’s eye the melting tear,
“ Of two chaste hearts, by mutual passion join’d,
“ To absence, sorrow, and despair consign’d :
“ Oh ! then to swell the tides of social woe,
“ That heal th’afflicted bosom they o’erflow,
“ While mem’ry dictates, this sad shipwreck tell,
“ And what distress thy wretched friend beset !
“ Then, while in streams of soft compassion drown’d,
“ The swains lament, and maidens weep around—
“ While lisping children, touch’d with infant fear,
“ With wonder gaze, and drop th’ unconscious tear—
“ Oh ! then this moral bid their souls retain,
“ All thoughts of happiness on earth are vain.”

FALCONER.

MR. and Mrs. Seymour, content with a mere competence, lived at a small cottage, in a retired situation in Cornwall; their

VOL. II. B family,

family, their wishes, and their views had never risen above mediocrity. Mr. Seymour's father had been in trade; but his son, content with what he had, and attached to independence, lived in quiet leisure, doing his duty in the domestic circle, and benefiting, as far as was in his power, his necessitous neighbours. He was a good husband, a tender father, and a sincere friend. One boy had blessed his union, and to rear him in the paths of virtue, to implant in his breast high notions of honour and rectitude, and to give him a liberal education, was the first wish of both his parents. Their own confined knowledge they had often lamented, and to obviate it in their child, they sent him to a public school very early in life, by the most strict economy in their little household, endeavouring to spare from their

own income the annual stipend requisite for their Edward's maintenance abroad. Edward grew up all that the fondest parents could wish ; and when they saw his fine person, and listened to his just sentiments and intelligent conversation, they rejoiced at the part they had adopted towards him. He early intimated a wish of entering the Army ; tenderly as his parents doted on him, yet they made no objection to his following his inclinations when he should have attained a proper age : and he had just quitted the University, and his proud father had nearly beggared himself in purchasing a commission for him, when, after a very short illness, he left his beloved son for ever !

Mrs. Seymour was inconsolable. Her son hastened to her ; yet all his attention, his dutious care were vain ; his mother swiftly

followed her tender partner, and the young heart of Edward refused for a while every consolation.

Having sold the effects of his deceased parents; he found himself in possession of a thousand pounds, a small patrimony; but he had a sword, and with that he meant to *carve* his fortune; yet so enervated, so enfeebled did he feel himself by the indulgence of sorrow, so unequal to exertion, that he rejoiced at this time that his actual services were not wanted; and he remained on half pay, hovering near the spot where parental love and tenderness used to await him.

Mr. St. Ledger, a gentleman of family, and of great consequence in the county, had purchased the little inheritance of Edward Seymour. He had lately, by the decease of an uncle, come into possession of Penruther

Manor,

Manor, a large estate, and an old mansion which was contiguous to it. Mr. St. Ledger had met Seymour several times on the business: he was much struck with his person, and pleased with his address; and observing the pensiveness of his air, and the attachment which he still expressed for the cottage, although he had thought it prudent to dispose of it, desired him by no means to hurry out of it, but to reside in it as long as suited his own convenience or his wish. He invited him to be a constant guest at the Manor, which he said would be inhabited by his family for the ensuing eight months.

Seymour was grateful for the kindness of Mr. St. Ledger, but did not for a long time feel inclined to avail himself of his invitation, till being repeatedly pressed, he at length struggled with his repugnance, and

went to dine at the Castle. He found Mr. St. Ledger sensible, polite, and well-informed, yet ridiculously attached to rank and family. His son was still more strongly impressed with this idea of family importance, and the gradations in society; and was by no means so pleasing to the already lowered Edward as his father.

The daughters—ah! in them he found every grace and every virtue which could adorn women. Louisa was sprightly, affable, and condescending; but Caroline, who shall describe her? Not Seymour, for he already beheld her with the warm partiality of a lover. There was a mildness, a gentleness about her which enchanted him. She had heard of his sorrows; she was interested for him, and compassionate pity gave her the most angelic expression when she addressed him.

Seymour

Mr. Seymour no longer was a stranger at the Manor; mechanically he sought Penruther, intuitively did he place himself at the side of Caroline; with her ascended the cliff, with her walked over the meadows, with her visited that cottage now rendered doubly interesting by her participating in his feelings. But this dangerous calm lasted not long. An aunt of Caroline's was ill, and sent for her to town. The idea of a separation first opened the eyes of our young lovers, and they both in the same moment saw the error of their conduct. Seymour's high sense of honour made his whole soul recoil at the idea of having engaged the affections of Mr. St. Ledger's daughter; and trembling, fearful, and astonished, Caroline dared not reflect on the anger which would await her from her family, should her attachment

be unfortunately discovered by them. In moment of surprise Seymour had dared to own his passion ; and though he read in the soft eyes of Caroline that he was not heard with displeasure, yet his heart continually smote him for the imprudent disclosure.— Caroline left Penruther. At parting she promised Seymour that she would write to him, and by that method explain what she had found impossible while with him—the conduct she meant to pursue. In trembling, in heart-beating expectation, Seymour opened a letter, which in a few posts was brought him.

THE LETTER.

“ I condemn you not, Seymour : I hardly know how to condemn myself. Is it not natural

natural for hearts formed like our's to feel as our's have done? Nature knows not the distinction of family or rank, and I am the child of Nature; I have ever acted by its impulse, and now, when too late, I feel the weakness of my conduct. My father, my brother, their anger, their severe frowns, are ever before my eyes. Why, why did I not see my danger ere yet too late? Perhaps I might have had resolution to brave all their maledictions if I had been enabled to ensure the independence of the man I love; but that power is not mine, and I have too much of my father's nature in me to sue for a maintenance when I shall have acted repugnant to his inclinations. That my father, my brother, have seen our partiality for each other, is certain; that they condemn it, is also as sure; and my absence is of course thought fortunate.

fortunate. My Louisa feels for us, but advises me, and she always advises wisely, to conquer my affection : I shall therefore set about it. I receive no letters from you ; you will hear no more from me : this is decided. I cannot make your happiness, if I were to unite my fate with your's ; and I should have to oppose the will of my father, and to see my husband involved, for my sake involved, in pecuniary distress. This I cannot see, and therefore a long adieu!—Conquer your unhappy predilection, and think of me only as the sincerest of your friends.

“CAROLINE.”

This letter was not calculated to make a philosopher of Seymour. The openness of Caroline, her candid avowal of her love,

enchanted him; yet convinced by his own reflections, as well as her reasoning, that for both their sakes the wisest way was to endeavour to forget each other for ever, he consigned himself to despair. He attempted not to make her retract from her resolution, or to receive a letter from him; he knew that a decision of her's would be unalterable.

Caroline piously attended on her aunt, and in a sick chamber had tranquillized her mind, and in some measure had controuled her love for Seymour, when one evening she was summoned to the parlour; breathless, pale, and agitated, she found Seymour leaning with his head against the wainscot.

“To what am I to impute this intrusion, Sir?” said Caroline, in a cool manner, and with a forced severity in her air.

“To madness,” exclaimed he. “Oh Caroline!” and he fell on his knees, “we are about to part for ever!”

“For ever!” repeated Caroline; her face grew pale, and she sunk on a seat.

“My regiment is ordered to embark for the East Indies,” said Seymour, in a desponding tone. “A war in that country, the unhealthy climate, the long, long distance, the seas that swell between us, Oh Miss St. Ledger!” and he took her hand, “is there, think you, is there any chance of our ever meeting again in this world?”

Caroline spoke not, but she sobbed aloud.

“Am I not a wretch?” cried he. “Is there on earth a more isolated, a more despairing being than your Edward? About to quit the adored, the beloved woman of his heart, without daring to ask even for her correspondence,

Oh
we
her
for
de-
the
nce,
St.
ere,
ver
nd.
Is
de-
t to
his
her
ce,

correspondence, never to see, never to hear of her, for whom alone he would exist, except, perhaps in a moment of anguish, the hateful sounds should reach his ears, that she is become the happy wife of another ! Oh family ! Oh birth ! what are thy dreadful prejudices ? Have I not a heart to shield thee ? Have I not an arm to protect thee ? And can a titled Lord, with proud blood boiling in his veins, can he do more ?”

Caroline had been lost in speechless agony and affright ; the energetic, the wild manner of Seymour, so unlike himself, had almost disabled her from answering him ; but when at length she spoke, he was in an instant calm, and, softened by her apparent wretchedness, he melted into tears.

Enthusiastic in her attachments, Caroline's love for Seymour would have braved a great
deal

deal of difficulty; and at once, to demonstrate her regard, she offered to give him her sacred, her irrevocable promise never to become the wife of another, but for his sake to remain for ever single.

“ And think you,” cried Seymour, “ that I am such a wretch as to receive such a promise ? No ! let me perish when I do. No ! nobly brave every obstacle ; give me your hand yourself, or let me, by one great struggle, break this bondage for ever. Ah ! my heart will break first !”

But I must shorten this scene, and inform my readers of what probably they have before suspected, that love yielded in spite of duty and honour, and that Caroline St. Ledger went out alone one morning, and met Seymour, as had been before agreed on, and accompanying him to church, she was rendered indissolubly his wife.

Mrs.

Mrs. Seldon, the aunt of Caroline, grew daily weaker ; and as she kept only two servants, Caroline easily contrived, by making a confidante of one of them, to admit her husband frequently without danger of discovery.

Two months had glided on halcyon wings, when the young Lieutenant was ordered immediately to embark at Gravesend. It would be impossible to paint his anguish at parting from, at leaving behind him his charming bride ; but inexorable to his entreaties, though participating in his sorrow, Caroline had made a solemn vow never to leave her aunt while she lived.—“ When she is gone,” cried she, “ I will alone tempt the dangerous deep, and rejoin my Edward.”

They parted, and the receding shores of England were soon lost to the melancholy Edward.

Mrs.

Mrs. Seldon survived a very short time. She bequeathed Caroline ten thousand pounds; with this the fond wife meant to gild the days of her happy husband. She sold it out of the funds where it had been lodged, and took her passage for India in the ——— East Indiaman.—Ah! my gentle readers, you guess the rest!—Before her embarkation Caroline had confessed her marriage to her father. She was ordered to leave his presence for ever, and required never to let her family know that she existed. Her sister was commanded never to receive a line from her on pain of instant dismissal from the paternal roof; and with a melancholy, a presaging heart did poor Caroline await the sailing of the vessel.

“Here,” said Mr. Seymour, as he recounted the story to his weeping auditors,
“here

" here is a letter I received from the dear angel ; read it, Miriam, for I cannot ;" and he quitted the room.

THE LETTER.

" MY DEAREST EDWARD,

" Death has at length claimed my aunt, and I hold myself in readiness for the ———, in which I have taken my passage. Ah ! much-loved ship, that will convey me to my Edward ! My kind aunt has been bountiful to her niece, and I shall bring with me a sum which will partly reward your disinterested affection. Fear not for me ; no danger appals, no distance intimidates ; even in that state when most women are cowards, I have no fear. I have procured
a steady

a steady nurse, and trust that I shall encounter and sustain the trying hour with fortitude and resolution; and then shall I present to my husband a sweet pledge of our love, and in that moment, that happy moment, be rewarded for every sigh. My family have discarded me for ever! From henceforth you are my husband, my father, my brother. My sister, for her I yet feel many pangs: but she is forbid to speak of, to hear from me. Perhaps at our return the proud hearts of the St. Ledgers may greet, as a relation, him whom they now scorn and condemn. Oh winds! Oh waves! be propitious, and quickly waft me to those happy shores which contain my Edward. Let nothing interrupt our course; let nothing impede our progress; let our speed be guided by the
impatience

impatience of a wife who is going to a much-loved husband!—Ah, who knows their own strength? Who should have told Caroline St. Ledger that she would have ventured on the world of waters alone, and unprotected? No! not alone—your image is still with me; not unprotected, for the Almighty is the same every where. Adieu, my Edward! but for a little while do I say adieu; for soon after you get this, you will receive into your bosom the happy wife of your choice—she who subscribes herself, with pleasure, your

“CAROLINE SEYMOUR.”

That the ——— East Indiaman was lost, with all her crew, is a melancholy truth imprinted in indelible characters on the hearts
of

of hundreds, who in her wreck lost the dearest hopes of their family, the solace of their age, the guides of their youth! Caroline Seymour was there; and we may picture to ourselves the frantic grief of her Edward when he heard that the merciless ocean had swallowed up his heart's best treasure. Distracted, and desponding by turns, it was a long time ere he could attend to the duties of his station. Time, that great soother, at length restored him to some degree of melancholy composure. He signalized himself in the war with Hyder Ally, and received the thanks, and a reward for his services, of the East-India Company. He had been promoted to the rank of Colonel; but as soon as he could retire with honour, he left the service, and resided chiefly at Calcutta, where he formed a strict friendship with a
Mr.

Mr. Marsden, a man of limited fortune, but of great merit. Mr. Marsden had an only child: Seymour received her from his dying friend at that awful moment when the struggling soul was about to leave its tenement of clay for ever. He vowed that he would be a father to her. This vow he scrupulously performed; and Henrietta Seymour, as he would now call her, never knew the want of parental care.

A long residence in India, and mental suffering, had so impaired the health of Mr. Seymour, that his medical attendants strenuously pressed his return to his native country. England, that beloved clime, held out nothing to console him for long years of wretchedness; and he dreaded to approach it, lest former scenes should again burst his scarcely closed wounds: yet when

he

he looked at Henrietta, when he thought of her unprotected state, he consented to try to lengthen out his days, and was landed safely in England.

Ah ! what were his sensations when, as he travelled to Penzance, he distinguished through the tufted trees, on a distant eminence, the white dear cottage of his infancy, when he could discern the rising smoke ascend from the chimnies of Penruther Manor, in the vale beneath. Imagination portrayed the former inhabitants of those dwellings, and the big tears rolled down his cheeks ! It was then that he felt the influence of local attachment, then when he bade the postboy stop, and strained his aching eyes to see those well-remembered objects.

“ Ah, Caroline ! ” he cried, as he smote his breast in anguish, “ but for Seymour, thou mightst have been still alive ! ”

On

On enquiry, Mr. Seymour learned that Mr. St. Ledger, the father of his wife, had died soon after he had received intelligence of his daughter's fate, as it was supposed of a broken heart ; that the present Mr. St. Ledger never resided at Penruther, but lived wholly in Kent ; and that Louisa St. Ledger had married a Mr. Lester, had been early left a widow, and lived entirely at her jointure-house in a different part of the county. Once more to see Mrs. Lester was his most sanguine wish ; yet he felt that his health was not strong enough to fit him to encounter the meeting immediately.

It was on his return from Penzance that Mr. Seymour met our heroine : her person, her manner had interested him ; the name of St. Ledger affected him unaccountably. Her having been brought
over

over from the East-Indies seemed to draw her nearer to his heart ; and as he sat attentively watching her ingenuous countenance, he could almost have fancied her his Caroline. “ It is not ideal,” he would say, “ the likeness is not ideal ; just so did she look and smile when, green in youth and loveliness, I last beheld her !”

CHAP.

T
quite
Seyn
could
rietta
affec
them
first
vo

CHAP. II.

“ Comes not that blood as modest evidence

“ To witness simple virtue ?”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE sudden sight of Mrs. Lester had quite unhinged the weak nerves of Mr. Seymour, and several days elapsed ere he could leave the house. Miriam and Henrietta never quitted him ; their attention, their affection were redoubled since he had made them acquainted with his sad story. The first hour that he was able to leave his

chamber, Mr. Seymour insisted on Miriam's calling on Mrs. Lester. She gained that lady's address at the pump-room, and eagerly sallied forth to her house. What was her disappointment when a servant informed her that her mistress was too much indisposed to receive company!

"Tell her," said Miriam, "it is ——" Then stifling a sigh, she paused, and went from the door.—"Ah!" cried she, "I forgot that in me Mrs. Lester could only recognize a girl whom she once saw; while in her I am ready to embrace a friend, a relative, a mother, an instructress. Oh! shall I ever forget the indefinable sensations which filled my whole soul when Mr. Stafford introduced me to her at Y——?"

Silent, dejected, and dispirited, Miriam returned to the Parade; but not willing to
shew

shew Mr. Seymour how deeply she felt her disappointment, she remained in another room for some time after her return, and on her joining Mr. Seymour, she merely said that Mrs. Lester was unwell, and did not admit company that morning. The next day Miriam was again at Mrs. Lester's door. She received the same answer, and was again restrained from sending in her name by the fear of being deemed intruding and familiar; and she measured back her steps, and gave the same account of her visit as on the preceding morning.

"You are too scrupulous, my love," said Mr. Seymour; "go again to-morrow, and send up your name, the name she knew you by—St. Ledger; you will be admitted then. Mrs. Lester fears being overpowered by the Bath loungers, those frivolous beings

who call at the doors of their acquaintance merely because they cannot kill time within their own. No, my Miriam, I will not have you mistaken for one of those; a friend like you would, I am sure, be highly acceptable to Mrs. Lester; a visit from you would make her forget her pain; and who so fit as you to announce to her the return of one who has had so near a connection with her family?"

Miriam anxiously awaited the ensuing morning; yet once more was she about to knock at Mrs. Lester's, when a board hung out, and the words "This house to be let" struck her eye. With a palpitating heart she lifted the knocker. A dirty servant girl appeared, whose brush and mop announced her employment. To her enquiry "Is Mrs. Lester at home?" she was answered,

answered, "If you mean the lady who had this house, Ma'am, she has left it ; she went off early this morning."

"What, left Bath?"

"Oh yes, Ma'am, gone this morning."

"But I thought she was very ill?"

"I don't know as to that, Ma'am; she's gone;" and the busy damsel began to handle her mop so adroitly, that Miriam was obliged to walk away. Much as she felt the disappointment, much as she wondered at Mrs. Lester's travelling when labouring under indisposition, yet could she not help feeling thankful that she had been withheld from sending up her name.

"She would have told Mr. Fitzpatrick who protects me," cried she, "and I should have been torn away from my dear friends, and taken back to the Castle."

Had Miriam known the ease with which Mr. Fitzpatrick bore her absence, not to say the pleasure he felt at having washed his hands of her, she would have felt this to have been a very foolish fear; as it was, she was almost compensated for her not meeting Mrs. Lester, by knowing that her residence would be still concealed from the Fitzpatricks.

Miriam longed to inform the faithful Joseph, and his good-hearted Joanna, of her present happy situation; but she was fearful of her letter falling into some other hands. Mr. Fitzpatrick sent constantly to the Y—— post-office for his letters, and one with the Bath post-mark for the rustic Joanna, might become a subject of curiosity;—she waited therefore, with anxious impatience, to
learn,

learn, by some means or other, when Mr. Fitzpatrick returned to town. At present there seemed no idea of a dissolution of Parliament, and it was generally supposed that it would be suffered to die a natural death. When this was certain, she knew that Mrs. Fitzpatrick would no longer be withheld from London, as her aversion to the Castle she had never strove to hide ; and Mr. Fitzpatrick, finding the object of his journey fruitless, would have no further wish to remain there.

When Miriam communicated her third and last failure to Mr. Seymour, he said, " You shall not be disappointed long, my love ; for in the course of the summer, if my health will allow me, I will go into Cornwall on purpose to pay a visit to Mrs. Lester, and of course my two girls shall accompany me. I am sorry she has left

Bath so suddenly ; but I was not equal to encounter a meeting while she was here, so, till I feel a little stronger, I must postpone the journey."

The weather now began to be so intensely hot at Bath, that Mr. Seymour resolved to leave it ; but as he had found great benefit from the waters, he was not willing to go far from them :—he therefore took a house at Clifton for two months, and on Sion Hill Miriam breathed the fresh air, and at the same time feasted her eyes with the magnificent scenery which is there presented to the view. Over the down, arm in arm, did our two lovely girls take their morning rambles ; and the roses on their cheeks soon shewed how far preferable their present residence was to that which they had quitted.

In

In walking, in reading, in drawing, and music, their time was wholly engrossed. They sought not for society amongst the company at the Wells, or on the Hill; they sought not for amusement out of their own little sphere, and three quiet sober weeks tranquilly passed on. Mr. Seymour's looks, his spirits, and his health improved every day, and this alteration in him filled the breast of Miriam with grateful pleasure; she seemed to have forgotten all her former disquietudes. Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick were scarcely ever thought of; the low Jason was become a dead letter; Mrs. Stafford was seldom recalled to her memory; and if the image of Henry Stafford sometimes would intrude itself on her imagination, she indulged not in the contemplation.

At this time Bristol was honoured by the appearance of a great actress; she had engaged to perform at the Theatre for a few nights only: and, to shew that her merits were felt, every part of the house was constantly crowded. Mr. Seymour, unwilling that his girls should lose such an opportunity of seeing a woman so eminently conspicuous, engaged places for the night on which she was to perform Lady Randolph in Home's affecting Tragedy of Douglas. Our trio were safely seated in a front row of one of the side boxes when the curtain drew up. Miriam was very young when she had been once taken by Miss Fitzpatrick to see this accomplished actress. The impression she had then received had not been forgotten; and on her appearance on the stage, her whole soul was absorbed in attention. The "Oh Douglas!

"Douglas ! Douglas !" in the opening speech was indescribably affecting ; not a look, not a thought had Miriam but for the scenes before her : the tender mother, the afflicted widow, and the noble son, entirely engrossed her, while Henrietta, the artless Henrietta, wept aloud.

Mr. Seymour, who had lost a wife on the world of waters, sympathized with the affectionate parent, who, when it was dark December, when wind and rain had beat all night, had trusted her infant across the Carron ; how did the heart of Mr. Seymour throb in unison at these affecting lines !—

" Silent, alas ! is he for whom I mourn ;

" Childless, without memorial of his name,

" He only now in my remembrance lives."

The boxes were so crowded, and so prodigiously thronged with company, that

the doors were obliged to be kept open to admit a little air ; but the end was not obtained that was desired, for many gentlemen came from other parts of the house, and filled up the doorways, and the heat continued as oppressive as before. A gentleman stood negligently leaning against the back of the box: his countenance was pallid ; his attention seemed to be taken up with the representation, and he spoke not to any being around him. Towards the close of the fifth Act two gentlemen pressed forward, as if to obtain a view of the company in the front seat. The stranger, though much incommoded, gave way ; and without attending, could not help hearing 'part of their conversation.

“ Indeed it is the same Mr. Seymour :
I have seen him so often at Cheltenham,

that I cannot be mistaken ;—nor can I have forgotten his little blue-eyed girl ; where he can have picked up his other daughter, is to me surprising !”

“ Oh,” answered the other, “ these India Nabobs easily procure their children of adoption ; but it surprises me, I confess, that they appear so attached to him—such a disparity of years ! for both the girls appear children, though they are really very handsome.”

“ I can’t exactly distinguish which is the new favourite,” said the first speaker.

“ Don’t you see that brown-haired nymph in white, with the beautifully turned shoulders ? Ah ! my friend, these India gentlemen know how to chuse beauty ; they have been used to see the loveliest of our females brought over to their market, and hence an every-

every-day face will not go down. Now, now you may see her; look how she smiles on her protector!"

Instinctively the eyes of the solitary mortal followed those of the two gentlemen, who had been thus animadverting on Mr. Seymour and his unconscious companions. Gracious God! did not his senses deceive him? Could he credit his eyesight? Could that be Miriam St. Ledger? Could he have heard her so spoken of? Was it? No, it could not be possible; and he strained his eyes as though he would burst their sockets. At that moment Miriam turned her head: he had a full, a perfect view of her countenance; and Henry Stafford, the no longer doubting, but the distracted, the miserable, yet adoring Henry saw her, with a fascinating smile, and the most bewitching air, listen to
the

the remarks of the gentleman who sat beside her. He hardly breathed, he scarcely kept his senses; yet dreadful, wounding as was the sight, heart-breaking as was the intelligence which had reached his ears, he tried to recal his scattered thoughts, and to continue to attend to the persons who had thus unknowingly affected him.

“ This Mr. Seymour is really a monopolizer; two at a time is a problem I cannot solve:—and how attentive the girls seem to each other! No jealousy—no.”

“ Why, I believe I can easily solve that problem. The little blue-eyed nymph is a *corps de reserve*; she will get older you know, and when the brown-haired lass is discarded, then the youngest child ——”

“ I cannot bear this,” cried Stafford; “ one moment longer, and I shall die!” and he
forced

forced his way out of the box. The gentlemen thought he alluded to the heat. Alas! Stafford's was indeed the fever of the mind.

"Never, no never," thought he, "will I trust in woman more. Oh Miriam, Miriam! and is it you, who, with an angel form, an angel face, is it you who are thus lost to fame, to character, to respectability?" Dreading to stay, yet unable to leave the place which contained her who had thus tortured him, Stafford continued to pace up and down the lobby with hasty and perturbed steps, unmindful of the noisy and riotous mirth of those around him. At length the play was over, and the greatest part of the audience was leaving the Theatre, unable to relish the noisy humour of the farce after having their tenderest affections so forcibly interested. The lobby was crowded,

crowded, carriages were loudly called for, and a general bustle had taken place, when Mr. Seymour, leading his two fair *protégées*, came into the lobby, and walked to the fire. Stafford was near them, yet he had not resolution to make himself known to Miriam ; he averted his head, yet stood closer to them, to catch every word they uttered.

“ Pray, my dear Sir,” said Miriam, “ take care of yourself ; the air comes in here very keen.”

“ Never fear, my love,” answered Mr. Seymour. “ Do you stand here together, and I will see if my carriage be ready.”

Mr. Seymour now left the two young ladies.

“ Oh for a little resolution !” thought Stafford ; but no, he felt he could not speak, and he stood in momentary expectation

tion of losing the object of his attention—perhaps for ever!

“ Mr. Seymour’s carriage stops the way,” was now audibly uttered. The name struck on the ear of Stafford like electricity.

Mr. Seymour returned.—“ The crowd is so great without this door,” cried he, “ that I fear to take both of you at a time. Miriam, have you courage to let me leave you, and put my Henrietta first into the carriage? I cannot find my servant.”

Mr. Seymour was answered in the affirmative.

“ Now,” thought Stafford, “ or never, never more!” As Mr. Seymour led off Henrietta, he advanced.—“ Miss St. Ledger,” cried he.—Miriam started.—“ Henry! Mr. Stafford, I mean. Good Heavens! from whence?”

“ Oh!”

"Oh!" cried Stafford, "let me not lose this minute, this eventful minute, big with fate, teeming with mystery—tell, Oh tell me, Miriam, why have you left the Castle? Where is my sister, where Mr. Fitzpatrick?"

"And are you ignorant of my leaving them?"

"Oh! yes, I am ignorant of every thing. But why are you here? Who is this Mr. Seymour? Why do you not return to the Castle?"

"To the Castle! Oh never, never! Mr. Seymour is the most generous, the most disinterested of men."

"His generosity I do not doubt; perhaps his disinterestedness is more questionable," said Stafford, gravely; then with a sigh, "I have no right, Madam, to ask or to controul, to give advice, or to—— But pray,"

pray," as if recollecting himself, "is Mr. Seymour related to you?"

"No," exclaimed Miriam, with surprise.

"From whence then your change of name?"

"It was his wish. I answer your questions, Mr. Stafford," said Miriam, assuming an ease which she was far from feeling, "and I trust you will not reveal my present residence to Mr. Fitzpatrick. His knowing it could only needlessly vex me, and at present I am the happiest of human beings."

"May you long continue so, Madam!" said Stafford. Then clasping his hands in agony, he said, "Oh Miriam St. Ledger! thou art lost for ever!"

He rushed out of the Theatre, and at the same moment Mr. Seymour seized the hand of Miriam, and, more dead than alive, hurried her into the carriage.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

“ I have mark'd a thousand blushing apparitions

“ To start into her face; a thousand innocent shames,

“ In angel whiteness, bear away those blushes.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“ OH Miriam St. Ledger! you are lost for ever!” rung on the ears of our heroine like the knell of death.—Good God! what could he mean? To what could the wild energy, the distraction depicted in Stafford’s manner—to what could it tend? And did he
wish

with her to return to the Castle, to Mr. Fitzpatrick? Had not he seen enough of her misery, her forbearance there? Yes, she was surely lost, for ever lost from Tunacombe; for never, unless she was compelled, would she return to Fitzpatrick."

These retrospections passed in the mind of our heroine during her ride back to Clifton. Ashamed of continually complaining, and fearing that Mr. Seymour would imagine she cherished a querulous and repining temper, she resolved to be silent with regard to her meeting with Stafford. Her taciturnity did not escape observation; she attributed it to a violent head-ach, occasioned by the heat of the playhouse and the glare of the lights. Henrietta was repeating every passage which had particularly affected her in the play. Mr. Seymour
listened

listened with fond attention; and Miriam, leaning back in the carriage, indulged in sad reverie.

Too surely her head ached, and her heart ached too! Why did the incomprehensible Stafford thus affect her? Why was it continually her fate to have him thrown across her path, to see him so indefinitely, so singularly interested for her? And yet, at every succeeding meeting, why did she discover fresh mystery, fresh inconsistency, fresh cause for wonder?

Miriam retired to her room immediately on her return; but there her thoughts accompanied her, and excluded repose. Had not Stafford told her at Y—— that he saw and pitied her situation? Did he not know Mr. Fitzpatrick's designs with regard to Jason? and yet had he not now, when she
had

had herself told him of her happiness, had he not asked her in a serious, a solemn voice, asked her to return to the Castle ?

“ Oh Stafford !” cried she, “ art thou really of a disposition which cannot behold the happiness of another ? Is it the misery of humanity which alone interests thee ? Oh ! I have been used to think of thee in a far more amiable light !”

The uneasy vigils of Miriam had taken away the roses from her late blooming countenance, the bright lustre from her eyes ; and, pallid and pensive, she joined Mr. Seymour and Henrietta at breakfast. Much did she struggle to wear her usual easy manner, yet she could not alter her looks ; and Mr. Seymour in an instant observed them.—“ You are a bad rake, Miriam,” cried he ; “ yet how is it—at Bath I did not observe that late hours,

or

or crowded houses had this effect on you ; surely something has otherwise indisposed you ?”

“ You forget, my dear Sir, that of late I have been so regular in my hours, and pursuits, that a little dissipation will fatigue ; in fact, your Miriam is not made for a fine lady, and Mr. Fitzpatrick’s account of my obscure birth I can easily credit, when I feel myself so unfit for the higher walks of life.”

“ I shall stop your fibbing tongue,” said Mr. Seymour : “ I will not have you talk thus ; from whence do you derive the elevation of your sentiments, the nobleness of your soul ?”

“ From my parents, perhaps, I inherit them. Oh !” said she, clasping her hands, and as it were lifted out of herself in the

moment of enthusiasm, "though they were poor in blood and in fortune, might they not be noble in spirit, might they not be gloriously independent—even while thought ignoble by the world, even while earning their daily bread, might they not feel true nobility of soul? The distinctions of society are, and ought to be respected; but surely there is no distinction of soul—surely, if his talents were cultivated, if his feelings were drawn forth, and succoured by an enlightened mind, surely the same virtues, the same affections would be found in the hard-favoured peasant, as in his more attractive Lord!"

Miriam stopped and blushed, ashamed at her own fervour; she took out her handkerchief, and wiped off the starting tear. Mr. Seymour pressed her hand in his, saying,
"Charming

“Charming girl! at this moment art thou dearer to my heart than if thou wert the daughter of the highest Peer this land could boast. Oh Miriam! tell me, how is it that your every sentiment is mine—that just as the thought springs across my mind, your lips have uttered it?”

“It is,” said Miriam, “that, as far as my feeble judgment will let me, I strive to walk in the paths of virtue—it is that you never swerve from them, and that I catch my lesson from your approving or condemning look—it is that in you I behold a friend, a father!”

“Oh that thou wert indeed my daughter!” said Mr. Seymour, folding her in his arms, “that my Caroline——”

He could say no more. He gently seated Miriam in a chair, and left the room. The

tide of feeling overpowered our heroine, and she gave full vent to her relieving tears, while Henrietta's sympathizing eye caught the infection.

Three days elapsed, yet Miriam could not shake off the effects of her meeting with Stafford. The Grecian Daughter was to be performed at Bristol, and Henrietta wished to go. Mr. Seymour did not oppose her wish, but said he would again accompany her. Fearing she knew not what in again encountering Stafford, Miriam desired to remain at home, excusing herself from going, as having been so materially indisposed the last time. Mr. Seymour had but just left her, and she was sitting resting her head on her arm in pensive reflection, when the postman rapped at the door, and she was surprised by having a letter immediately put
into

into her hands. The writing was totally unknown to her. The post-mark was Exeter. She opened it, and could scarcely read through the few words, so great was her consternation.

THE LETTER.

“ Your looks are innocent, even while your guilt is almost incontrovertible : you are yet young in error. Oh listen to the warning voice of one of your own sex, and return to the paths of virtue ; return to that situation which you ought not to have quitted, however specious the allurements which were held out to you.—Reflect on these words, these warning words, ere yet too late !”

The voice of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, of her persecuting guardian (for to their malice she imputed this diabolical scrawl—diabolical in the intention, as it was meant to undermine her peace) seemed to be denouncing vengeance in the ears of Miriam; and she sunk on the floor, lost to sense, to life, and recollection. How long she remained in this state she knew not. She felt, on her regaining animation, she felt herself in the arms of a person whose audible sighs bespoke a participation in her sufferings.

Her question "Where am I?" was answered quickly, "Here, in the arms of Stafford, those adoring arms which would have shielded thee through life!"

Miriam was instantly roused. She broke from him, and seated herself in a chair. She covered her face with her handkerchief, while

while she coolly said, though in a broken voice, "Whence, Oh whence this visit?"

"Oh Miriam!" cried Stafford, falling at her feet, "I am the most infatuated of men. I have sought, I have watched for this opportunity. At what a moment did I gain it! I found her, for whom alone I breathe, I found her extended lifeless on the ground! But now hear me, in pity hear me; listen with attention, for your own sake listen.—You are not happy, Miriam; the situation which you now fill is not congenial to your notions, to the natural bent of your own inclinations, however they may for a while have been diverted from their course. Oh Miriam! rely on my honour, trust yourself to me; I will seek out a home for you, I will find out a companion of your own sex, I will do every thing that lays in my power to make you——"

“ Good God ! ” said Miriam, starting from her seat, the blood mounting to her cheeks, “ good God ! Mr. Stafford, how dare you wound my ears by such a proposal ! Oh Mr. Seymour ! why, why did you leave me ? But let me pass, Sir ; I cannot longer blast my sight with an object who has thus dared, inhumanly dared to insult me.”

“ Insult you ! ” cried Stafford, intercepting her progress, and throwing himself again at her feet, “ Oh Miriam ! most lovely, and still most beloved of women, Oh ! for your own sake hear me—I conjure you by all your hopes of eternal happiness, by all your dread of the insults of that world which you now seem to condemn ! ” and he hid his face in her gown, and wept.

Miriam scarcely knew what she did ; but she returned, and seated herself, again hiding her face with her handkerchief.

“ Then

“ Then you will hear me,” said Stafford, eagerly; “ you will not despise——”

“ I will for ever despise the man who has wounded the ears of unprotected innocence with such insulting offers !”

“ Innocence !” cried Stafford, “ Oh Miriam ! what do you mean ? Insult you ! No.—Heaven is my witness that to believe you innocent would at this moment give me the purest, the most ineffable delight ! Even now that I know you in this house under the protection of a stranger, even now that the most glaring proofs are exhibited to my view, even now I almost doubt my senses ; for who that sees that ingenuous, that artless countenance, that beholds——”

“ Oh merciful God !” cried Miriam, and she fell back lifeless in her chair ; for that instant her whole frame experienced a revul-

sion, for that instant her eyes were opened, and she saw through the suspicions, the heart-wounding suspicions of Stafford.

“What have I done?” said Stafford, stamping in agony; “what have I done? Oh Miriam, Miriam! I have killed thee: I have destroyed her who saved me from destruction!”

After some time Miriam recovered, but she recovered to a full sense of her situation; her sobs, her tears were not to be restrained. “Leave me, Mr. Stafford,” cried she. “Oh! you know not how you have smote my heart! I can never forget the low, the contemptible opinion which you have entertained of me! And could you suppose me a wretch, lost to honour, to reputation, to virtue? Do you think I could so soon forfeit my only dower? Know you not——But no matter; it is beneath me to make an explanation

nation to him who could have harboured such a vile, such a degrading opinion of me."

"I can bear all this: I can receive all your reproaches without emotion; for I have more than an equivalent here," said Stafford, laying his hand on his heart.—"I feel that you are still the lovely, the virtuous Miriam, of my heart's first choice. Oh unworthy as were my suspicions, disgraceful as they now place me in your estimation, condescend, Oh! nobly condescend to listen to my vindication; by that candour which has ever so eminently distinguished you, I entreat."

Miriam looked up with a melancholy air, though it bespoke attention. Stafford then related his leaving the Castle suddenly at a time, when he still supposed her confined to her chamber. He mentioned having attended a friend to Clifton, where at Bristol Theatre

he had heard conversation which had almost distracted him.—Ever just in her sentiments, Miriam acknowledged, tearfully acknowledged that there were but too many appearances against her. In a moment was Stafford again at her feet. Miriam resumed her self-consequence.—“ Yet,” cried she, “ without other proofs, surely it was cruel to indulge suspicions, doubts which were thus disgraceful.”

“ Oh! much I doubted, for much I loved,” said Stafford, with warmth.

“ Your conduct has been ever mysterious, inexplicable to me,” said Miriam; “ and yet, Mr. Stafford, I have very unwillingly given way to suspicions—even when appearances have been strongly against you, I have ever hesitated to put on them the worst construction.”

“ You

"You are an angel!" cried Stafford, snatching her hand, and putting it to his lips; "but from henceforth all mystery shall be done away; to you I will confide my every thought, and you shall be my judge: I fear not to stand the trial, even now your looks are mercy. Say but that you forgive my late inhuman behaviour, for that alone lies heavy here."

"No, I cannot say that," said Miriam, "till I have exculpated myself: I must relate my own history, and though I must speak of your sister, indeed, Stafford, I speak of her but as she deserves."

The eyes of Stafford were fixed on Miriam with the most earnest and attentive expression as she recounted her little history; her's could not bear their gaze, and they sought the carpet. She mentioned her conference

with Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick, her illness as resulting from it, the note from the lady, and her own immediate resolve. She omitted the summer-house meeting with Mortimer, and the picture scene in the dining-parlour. She did nothing "extenuate, or set down aught in malice;" yet she described her uneasiness as most complicated and insupportable.

"You are an angel!" said Stafford, "the most perfect of women, and I am a wretch undeserving your clemency; yet withdraw it not from me I beseech you. I cannot relate my story; it requires leisure, and I will write it for your perusal. Say you will deign to read it—say you will peruse it with an unprejudiced eye."

Miriam was silent, for she felt that that would be impossible.

"But

“ But Mr. Seymour,” said Stafford, walking to and fro in agitation, “ how have I injured him ?”

“ You know him not,” said Miriam.
“ Oh! had you, had you heard him lament to me his much-loved Caroline, had you seen his humane attention to the friendless orphan whom he now cherishes, you would have been most sceptical indeed to have doubted his singleness of heart a moment. I now see that in the opinion of the world, who only judge from appearances, and are too selfish themselves to believe that another acts from nobler motives—in the opinion of that world I must appear in rather a questionable shape ; yet, when you consider the unprotected state in which Mr. Seymour found me, you will not wonder at my not reflecting on the step I was going to take.

Mr.

Mr. Seymour, good man ! by giving me his name, meant, I doubt not, to obviate all the invidious remarks with which he might be attacked ; but, alas ! who can escape calumny ?”

“ Who indeed ?” cried Stafford. “ But spare me on this wounding subject, most noble-minded of human beings !”

“ No,” cried Miriam, “ I will try to reconcile you to yourself, by shewing you that you are not the only one who has mentioned their suspicions. This letter, not two hours ago, had bereft me of sense and life ; for, ah ! Henry—Mr. Stafford, I imputed it to your sister’s malice : I now have no doubt but that it came from a real friend.”

“ I cannot,” said Stafford, when he had read it, “ I cannot venture to say what this
heart

heart is labouring with till, till—you will read the history of my life? Oh! extend your benign compassion as I now part from you, and say you will think of me as one not wholly unworthy your friendship, your—— Ah! say,” said he, hesitating, “say that if my confessions exculpate me in your opinion—say, candid, ingenuous Miriam, that you will introduce me to Mr. Seymour.”

“All this I freely promise,” answered Miriam, extending her hand as Stafford gained the door; “and happy will it make me to find you worthy of his notice.”

“I must go,” cried Stafford; “this overpowering generosity unmans me. Adieu, most injured of women!”—Stafford then rushed hastily out of the house.

To delineate the feelings of our heroine is impossible; they were undefinable even to herself.

herself. The suspicions, the reproaches, what she had thought the insults of Stafford, had severely wounded her heart. His subsequent behaviour, his penitence, his contrition were not lost upon her; and even while she had resented the contumely with which he had loaded her in his idea, she acknowledged to herself that nothing but the warmest interest for her welfare, for her real happiness, could have induced him to seek her out, and to have told her what he considered as unwelcome truths.

“ Oh Stafford !” cried she, “ I know, I feel that I too have injured thee; and if I should find thee exculpated from every unworthy propensity—Oh ! how shall I withhold from thee my whole heart, for that he loves me is now apparent? Yet his uncle’s pride, his duteous affection, my poverty,
my

my low birth, alas ! I must not think of him ; better would it be to remain in ignorance of his story for ever. And can I, dare I—alas ! poor human nature, I feel I cannot.”

When Miriam reconsidered the circumstances which Stafford had hastily related, she found that her disappearance from the Castle must have been followed on the succeeding morning by Stafford's ; and she had probably been set down by the party left behind, as having had him for her companion. Uneasy as this reflection might at another time have made her, there was a feeling near her heart which seemed at present an antidote for that, and almost any other unpleasantry. Mrs. Stafford's good opinion she no longer cared for, as she could no longer love her ; yet she was convinced that the idea of her elopement

elopement with Henry Stafford would be a pungent wound in that lady's bosom.—
“ But let me wait,” thought she, “ and not hastily suspect. Ah ! Stafford, into what a mistake did hasty decision, a decision from appearances, lead thee !”

So long had Miriam ruminated, that she forgot the lapse of time till Mr. Seymour's carriage awoke her from her ideal trance. She received her two friends with a sort of pleased embarrassment in her manner, which did not escape the vigilant eye of Mr. Seymour; and when she informed him that she had had a visiter in his absence (for Miriam was above disguise), Mr. Seymour said, “ And not an uninteresting one I am sure, for your countenance appears animated and sparkling. Who is it that took advantage of my absence to gain a *tête-à-tête* with you ?”

Miriam

Miriam blushing answered, that it was Mr. Henry Stafford, who, having accidentally had a view of her, had found her out, and called upon her.

“ Why did you not ask him to await my return ?” said Mr. Seymour. “ Your account of him in your little narration interested me ; besides, he appeared your friend : grateful I am sure he ought to be to his preserver !—But what did the Castle party say at your desertion ? None of the rest of them are near, I trust ?”

Miriam now related Stafford's having quitted Tunacombe at the same time with herself ; and could not help hinting at the probability there was of scandal having impeached her as having him for a companion.”

“ Rest

“ Rest not a moment on the thought,” said Mr. Seymour; “ it is the good opinion of the virtuous that you ought to seek ; little consequence is it how we are estimated by those who are worthless.”

“ And yet ——” said Miriam.

“ Ah ! my dear child, I know what you would say ; yet, you would say, it is hard to be thought unjustly of even by the most unworthy ; but who, even when appearances are in the favour of virtue, who can teach them to think justly, and to judge with mercy ? But you have not told me—is Mr. Stafford going to call again ? Surely you asked him ?”

“ No,” said Miriam, “ I did not.”

“ No, no, she thought there was no occasion for that, Sir,” said the artless Henrietta, looking smilingly in the face of Miriam.

“ I

“ I must have his acquaintance,” said Mr. Seymour : “ I must hear from himself the account of your meeting on the cliff.”

“ I hope he will be found worthy of your friendship,” said Miriam, as she left the room ; and that hope, that sanguine hope kept her awake the greatest part of the night.

The following day Miriam was anxious and uneasy ; every minute she expected to hear from Stafford, yet every succeeding hour slowly passed on without her receiving a word from him. Just as she had retired for the night, a servant put into her hand a packet, which she said had been that instant left at the door ; and in the solitude of her chamber Miriam sat down to spend the midnight hour in perusing the life of Henry Stafford.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

“ The rugged hand of Fate has got between

“ Our meeting hearts.”

SOUTHERN.

“ MY trembling agitation will hardly allow me to begin; yet what have I to fear ? Have you not, gentle Miriam, told me that you would peruse these lines with an unprejudiced, a dispassionate eye ?”

“ No,” sighed Miriam, “ no, Stafford, I could not tell you that ; you will behold me at one time the victim of the delusions of others,

others," continued Stafford, "at another suffering from my own impetuosity of temper. After my rash conduct yesterday, after having seen me, as you have seen me, about to draw down the vengeance of the Almighty by plunging into the deep abyfs of waters, I need not say, that impetuosity, rashness, impatience are the leading traits of my character. That I am of an ancient and respectable family, my good uncle has frequently told you. My father was the third son of Lord Stafford. Lord Stafford was not rich, and a third son of a needy Nobleman is not frequently in an enviable situation. At the death of my grandfather, my eldest uncle, the present Lord Stafford, of course inherited the family estate and honours. The second son, Mr. Stafford, had just taken possession of a large estate and fortune left

him by an uncle ; and my father, poor, reflected
proud, noble in spirit as well as blood, which
nothing but his sword for his maintenance, which
had just married a beautiful young woman, know
descended from a House as noble and fa broo
as needy as his own. In the eyes of world of h
wisdom, in the eyes of Lord Stafford this her
ruin ; in the eyes of Mr. Stafford it was wat
equal alliance, and in the eyes of the adoring citu
husband it was perfect happiness ! Yet, then
my dotting father soon found that happiness her
makes but a transient stay in the abode dres
poverty ! He was called abroad, and leng
wife accompanied him. Nobly born, and reco
tenderly brought up, the hardships of in
fatiguing campaign were ill suited to the its
delicacy of my mother. She loved her fin
husband, tenderly loved him : for his sake fat
she coped with all the difficulties of their
situation in silence ; yet she could not help no
reflecting

reflecting on the blindness of that passion which had thus led them both into sufferings which otherwise they might never have known. Uncomplaining and meek, she brooded silently on her fate; the melancholy of her heart robbed her cheek of its colour, her eye of its brilliancy; and her husband watched, with the most excruciating solicitude, for the hour which would give to them an infant pledge of love, imputing her wan appearance, her pensive air, to her dread of approaching danger;—that hour at length arrived, and my sister Louisa was received into the warm hearts of her parents; in nursing her little girl, in providing for its infantine wants, in beholding its artless smiles, my mother experienced a tender satisfaction.

“ My father, delighted that she had now something to divert and interest her

in those hours when duty obliged him to leave her, fondled his little Louisa with enough double delight, as she had the power to affection sweeten existence to his beloved wife. This "W passed the two first years after the birth of in a f my sister. My mother felt tenderly anxious her spi for the provision, for the fate of her darling dispo and often wished herself in England, that often w she might endeavour to conciliate the affec nde. tions of Mr. Stafford towards his niece. with t My uncle had never seemed to think of the babes marriage state; he lived rather a retired habita life; his manners were then, as you have "I beheld them since, stately and commanding; my lo and he was generally put down for a deter- more mined bachelor, and his friends had often their told him, even before he attained the period and c of his life which I am now speaking of, that M they were sure he never could abstract time "A enough from

enough from his studies to engage the affections of any woman.

"When my mother again found herself in a state to increase her domestic circle, her spirits were sunk to the lowest ebb of despondency, and at my birth she would often weep over me with the fondest solicitude. She even ventured to express her wish to my father of returning with her babes to England, and settling in some little habitation near his brother.

"How," cried she, "can I demonstrate my love for these precious ones—how can I more forcibly demonstrate it than by leaving their father when exposed to danger, war, and death?"

My father pressed her to his bosom.—
"Ah!" cried he, "how can I ever part from thee? A separation from my wife,

from my babes, is it not worse than any of the evils which you have mentioned?"

My mother continued her persuasions, and at length her affectionate husband consented to her wish; and it was resolved that she should set out for England immediately after an action, which it was soon expected would take place. An action did take place; and at a very short distance from the seat of war, the clash of swords, and the din of arms, reached the ears of my mother. Ah! Miriam, pitying Miriam, will you not drop the moist tear of humanity, will you not sympathize with the widow, will you not feel for her little fatherless children?

All day had my mother sat in trembling anxiety. The night came, and she stood at a window watching for the partial lights, and listening to the confused sounds which at intervals

any of intervals she could distinguish from the
camp. At length a noise was heard near
her dwelling.—“Oh! perhaps,” thought
she, “he’s come—my Stafford is returned
to his impatient wife!”

A fearful, a foreboding presentiment
seemed to chill her frame. She undrew the
curtains which concealed her sleeping infants.
She looked on them; she touched their
lips, scarce knowing what she did, and was
hurrying to the entrance of the house. There,
Oh what a sight to one who loved so
well! she met the mangled, the cold body
of her husband! She shrieked, she fell, and
lost to all around her for many, many weeks,
she lay on the bed of sickness. At length
the recollection of her children roused her
maternal vigilance, and placing one on each
side of her, while her weak frame was

supported by pillows, she addressed herself to my uncle ;—her hand seemed to acquire new strength as she proceeded ; she was pleading for more than life—she was pleading for her children, for the dear offspring of her buried husband—she could not plead in vain ! My uncle, though high in spirit, though stern in manner, is not deficient in the warm virtues of the heart. While I am sure your eyes will trace my words, shall I ever be able to lay down my pen ? Oh Miriam ! I cannot resist transcribing her letter ; shall I not by that lengthen your attention ?

THE LETTER.

“ The afflicted widow of your brother takes up her pen to implore your attention,

Mr.

Mr. Stafford. Ere this you have heard the sad fate of my ever dear husband: I would have addressed you long before, but that I have been on the verge of the grave. I now linger yet a little longer. Heaven in its mercy has protracted my life; it suffers me to address you for my children—they are destitute, they are fatherless, they will soon be orphans. In the wide world they have not a friend if you will not extend your mercy! To Lord Stafford I dare not apply; he has a wife, he has a family, he contemned his brother's marriage, and perhaps his melancholy fate is not in his eyes sufficient retribution for his imprudence, and he will extend his neglect to my guiltless little ones. But to you, Mr. Stafford, to you I appeal—to you who act from principle, —to you who feel for the honour of your family,

family ; rescue it them from opprobrium, preserve my spotless ones from the misery of begging their daily bread ! Let them not experience the proud man's contumely ; cherish them in your heart—Oh succour them with your fostering hand ! Nurtured by you, they shall rise up, and bloom around you ; while neglected by you, they will wither like untimely flowers, and never see the light of the sun ; be cut off like their poor father, or wither in their bloom like their hapless mother !—I would have hastened to England—I would have prostrated them at your feet ; but, alas ! my weak frame will never enable me to visit my native land again. But even here in a foreign land I shall die contented, if a letter from you brings me the mercy-breathing tidings that you consent to grant my petition, to shield my darlings !

Oh

Oh may Heaven lengthen your days ! May they repay your care ! May they ever feel the warmest gratitude, the most filial love for such an uncle ! I can write no more. Refuse me not, I conjure you—refuse not to hear my prayer.

“ LOUISA STAFFORD.”

Having dispatched her letter, the impatience of my mother for an answer kept her in a state of mental disquietude and anxiety, which contributed to heighten her bodily ailment, and to weaken her frame, already reduced severely by a long illness; and life was about to part for ever, when my uncle's letter reached her.—Ah ! much-loved memory of my mother, let me hope that joy seized your withered veins, and one

bright gleam of setting life shone on your evening hours. She had scarcely strength to read the joyful lines which ensured to her children a protector. She folded them to her bosom; when she had at last finished the perusal, she lifted up her hands to Heaven, she implored its blessing on them, and she quietly lay down to rest on the bosom of her mother earth!—The letter of my uncle was preserved amongst other papers by a faithful servant of my mother's: I transcribe it for your perusal. Ah, generous Miriam! you must respect, you must revere my uncle, for he inherits many noble virtues!

THE LETTER.

“ DEAR MADAM,

“ Your letter has caused me great affliction. I regarded my brother, I had already
mourned

mourned for his loss ; but the knowledge that yet another Stafford had fallen in the service of his country, had somewhat allayed my regrets : but your letter has again called them forth, and I lament that any branches of my family should be reduced to bewail the loss of their head, and at the same time feel unprovided, and destitute of protection. I hesitate not to promise to receive your children under my care : the boy shall be educated liberally, and I will implant in him notions of honour and virtue. With regard to your daughter, I, Madam, by nature, and my turn of mind, am ill suited for her director. For your own sake, and for her's, I trust that your life will be spared ; for in my house you shall find an asylum, and in the protection of my brother's widow I shall perform an act of justice due to my family : yet, should
it

it please Providence to take you from this life, I will place your daughter in some seminary not beneath her rank, and hope that she will not disgrace the names of those from whom she sprang. Could you attempt your return to England, I think you would find it beneficial to your health; and the sooner I behold the children of my brother, the better shall I be pleased at your confidence in me.—I am, dear Madam, with wishes for your recovery and welfare,

“Your sincere friend,

“MONTAGUE STAFFORD.”

My mother's faithful servant soon got all things in readiness for our departure, and we were safely introduced to Stafford Lodge in Devonshire, the seat of my uncle. My
sister

sister was too young to be sensible of her situation : I was an imbecile infant, and we were received into the family of Mr. Stafford without knowing how much we were indebted to his kindly extended hand. A nurse was provided for me, and Louisa was boarded at an infantine seminary near the Lodge ; and thus passed some of the first years of our residence in England.

When I was very young, I was sent to Eton. My sister at the same time was placed at a fashionable school within a few miles of town. The young ladies, her companions, were all of high rank, or large fortune ; and Louisa early learned to appreciate very highly those paltry advantages which ought to give place to the more essential qualifications of the mind. At a proper age I was removed to Oxford, and on one of my

vacations from the University, I met my sister at the Lodge. I had not seen her for more than two years, my uncle having taken me on various tours during my vacations, and Louisa having spent her's at the houses of some of her schoolfellows. I found her much improved in person and manner. I was delighted at the meeting ; she seemed not to feel equal pleasure at the sight of me. My uncle had never disguised his preference for me ; he had often uttered before my sister his notions with respect to the distribution of fortune : sons he considered as wanting a handsome provision to enable them to support the family name and consequence, while daughters, with good persons and connections, he thought might be enabled to marry equal to their birth, and form an alliance which would place them
in

in affluent independence. Louisa, I have reason to think, did not much like my uncle's manner of thinking. Her notions of shew, of taste, and splendour, she had imbibed during several years' residence at a fashionable boarding-school, where the distinctions of birth were overlooked when opposed to that powerful equalizer, money; where the daughter of the low-bred Cit looked down on the daughter of the high-bred Peer, conscious that she had the power to eclipse her in every article of expence and magnificence. My sister had sometimes accompanied her City friends to their paternal mansions; and when she viewed the display of finery, the sumptuous elegance of their houses, the luxury of their tables, she often wished that Fate had placed her in such a situation. Louisa, being two years older than myself,

myself, had ever adopted a decided and authoritative tone towards me; yet, at the time I am speaking of, she had the infinite address to insinuate herself deeply into my regard, for no other reason, I now firmly believe, than that she might implant a deeper sting in my bosom. Particular business called away my uncle. To fill up the tediousness of time in the country, my sister asked his permission to invite to the Lodge a female friend, and Emily Melville shortly arrived.

Emily Melville was born of a good family; she had been early left an orphan, and was entirely dependant on an uncle, whom, having a large family, she could not expect to make a provision for her. He had given her a fashionable and expensive education, and he hoped that she would establish herself in marriage, and thus repay his care.

Emily

Emily was gentle, tender, and affectionate; her person was pleasing; her soft blue eyes were interesting: it was impossible to see her without feeling that she was a helpless woman, who wanted protection; for she did not appear capable of exertion, and her mind seemed formed to the softest sensibility. Naturally fond of the society of females, I spent my days with my sister and her friend. Louisa, (ah! let me not judge her wrongly, if I think that her conduct was produced by the deepest art), Louisa was more than commonly lively and spirited; her vivacity, her decided manner, when opposed to the gentleness, the timidity of her friend, afforded a striking contrast, and a constant variety in our conversations. If we walked, Louisa would seize my arm, and bid her friend take the other. If Emily played the harpsichord,

Louisa

Louisa would chuse the songs ; she would select the most romantic, the most impassioned, the most tender, and she would silently enjoy the bashful confusion of Emily. I felt for Emily exactly as I should have done for a younger sister ; no other emotion warmed my heart : I was pleased with her society, her gentle manners ; but I felt not that vacuum in her absence, that tedious restlessness, that abstraction from all other objects which have since rendered me — But I forget : pardon me, Miss St. Ledger, (for by that name I must still call you) ; I am straying from my subject.

I returned to Oxford. At parting, the trembling tear stood in the soft eye of Emily. I was affected by her apparent emotion.— Louisa embraced me affectionately—she even desired my correspondence. This she
had

had never done before. I was pleased and surprised, as I hoped her regard was increasing towards a brother who had ever loved her with the most undissimulated and disinterested affection; for often had I silently bewailed the apparent preference of my uncle for me, which I feared had been the cause of weakening the regard of my sister. Often have I wished, Oh how fervently wished! that my uncle would alter his opinion, and bestow on us an equal share of his fortune; and how frequently have I said, "When my own independence is secured, then my first care shall be to make an ample provision for my sister." But why do I thus needlessly detain your attention? It is—ah, Miriam! it is, that I know not when again—that this may be the last time! But I must proceed.

The

The letters of Louisa always mentioned her friend ; she spoke of her as labouring under secret melancholy, that the colour had left her cheek, that the smile no longer dimpled her mouth, and that her uncle vainly endeavoured to divine the cause of her dejection.—(My sister had returned to Mr. Melville's house in London with her friend).—I felt for Emily's sufferings, but I had not a suspicion of the motives which actuated my sister. Again I returned from College to the Lodge. My uncle was again absent, and Louisa and Miss Melville soon joined me. The alteration in Miss Melville's looks was apparent ; she blushed, she trembled, as I approached. I know not to what cause to attribute her confusion, for at that time I felt not the vanity which prompted me afterwards to believe myself
the

the cause. The behaviour of Emily now took a strange and variable turn ; she would chat and laugh for some time with the greatest levity ; in an instant she would relapse into silence ; heavy sighs would issue from her struggling bosom, and soft tears would moisten her eyelids. I sometimes ventured to enquire the cause ; her distress seemed to increase, and she would hastily leave the room. To my sister I applied. She kept a most provoking taciturnity, would often shake her head, would sometimes provokingly laugh, and enquire why I was so much interested for Miss Melville. Her answers only doubled my curiosity, and, without feeling the slightest emotion for Miss Melville, except what the purest brotherly esteem might have authorized, my conduct wore the appearance of another regard.

One

One day I surpris'd Emily in tears in the garden. I earnestly entreated that she would allow me to participate in her sorrows. She pushed me from her, and covered her face with her handkerchief. I left her in a state of anxious suspense, and meeting my sister, besought her to unravel the cause of her friend's distress, that I might try to alleviate it.

Louisa smiled.—“ Would you really sooth and participate in the sorrows of my friend, Henry ?” cried she.

“ Yes ; why, do you suspect me ?”

“ And you would do any thing in your power to alleviate them ?”

“ Assuredly,” said I. “ Do you think me the most unfeeling of mortals—the most selfish of mankind ?”

“ And

“
cause
sient
blush
“
out t
“
but c
cause.
She
cious
feature
was le
room
of it ;
cried
robbed
eyes w
that fo
VOL

“ And, seriously, you cannot divine the cause of her unhappiness, the cause of the silent tear, the heaving sigh, the conscious blush ?”

“ How is it possible,” answered I, “ without the least clue to guide me ?”

“ It is rather a difficult matter certainly ; but come, Henry, I will shew you the cause.”

She then took my hand ; a sort of malicious smile seemed to take possession of her features. I had not a suspicion of where she was leading me. We had reached a drawing-room ; a large mirror was placed at one end of it ; she led me to it.—“ Look there !” cried she ; “ behold the man who has robbed Emily of repose ; contemplate those eyes which have looked away her heart ; see that form which is implanted in her breast !”

I had stood for a minute like a foolish simpleton in the spot, in the attitude where my artful sister had placed me : I now regained my self-possession.—“ Fie, Louisa !” cried I, throwing myself on a sofa, “ can you not for one instant discard this foolish raillery ? Cannot the sufferings, the manifest uneasiness of Emily restrain your ill-timed levity ?”

“ Why you are the most artful of your artful sex !” answered she. “ You have done every thing that the most insidious deceiver could ; and now you have gained the affections of my friend, you basely trifle with them. Ungenerous brother !”

“ Good God, Louisa !” cried I, “ how you talk ! Have I ever sought to gain the preference of Miss Melville ? Have my words breathed any thing but the most disinterested friendship ?”

“ Not

"Not your words, perhaps—your looks though, brother; but, Lord! pray don't attempt to vindicate yourself to me. The poor girl pines, and if she cannot conquer her foolish passion, why she must pine on, you know."

With an air of *nonchalance* Louisa was then quitting the room.

"For God's sake stop!" cried I; "leave me not in this state of agitation. Are you not now trifling with my feelings? Pray, I conjure you, sister, be serious for a moment, and tell me, are you really convinced that Miss Melville entertains a preference for me?"

"Yes," cried she; "and if you are really such a fool as to wish for further proofs, come along—you shall have them."

She led me, I scarcely observed where, till I found myself in a small room within a grotto in the wilderness.—“Now fear yourself,” cried the artful girl, “and I will tell you.”

I obeyed her. She started up, and springing out of the room, she locked the door on the outside, and left the grotto. I now supposed this was merely another trick, and that, to amuse her, I was to be left in imprisonment some hours; but I was presently undeceived: she soon re-entered the grotto, conversing with Miss Melville. My heart beat violently as I unintentionally heard their conversation.

“But why give way to this grief, dear Emily? My brother——”

“Ah! name him not,” cried Emily, “unless you would have me die with blushes.

Oh

Oh Louisa! why do you thus seek to tear open, to expose my weakness? Why did you ever ask me here? Why did you ever, by your sisterly praises, excite in me a wish to see him? Why——”

“ Stop, my dear girl,” said Louisa, with much seeming affection in her manner, “ and tell me, do you really love him?”

“ More than my life! You know it, Louisa.”

“ And that he loves you is certain,” cried Louisa; “ and I’ll pawn my life upon his honour—ere to-morrow’s sun I’m sure you’ll see him at your feet.”

Ah, Miriam! ah, Miss St. Ledger! what were the sensations of my mind at this hearing? To know that I had power to make peace once more visit the countenance of Emily, to know that I had engaged

her affections, ah! how complicated, how violent were the emotions I felt!—I fought not to analyze my feelings: I dared not to examine them coolly; but when my sister released me, I took her hand, I kissed it, exclaiming, “Ah Louisa! your life would not have been forfeited; noble girl! you knew your brother’s heart.”—How blind, how duped was I!—Oh Miss St. Ledger! I now clearly distinguish what a tool my sister made of me.

There is no describing my feelings. Vanity of course must have settled her abode in my heart; for it was not love—ah no, ah no! I behaved with tender assiduity to Miss Melville; I dared avow a regard for her, and while blushes died her cheeks, she owned it mutual. Thus had I been drawn in the victim of artifice; but soon the delusion ended.

ended. I left the Lodge; a correspondence took place between me and Emily; my letters were grateful and affectionate, her's tender and impassioned. I was about to leave Oxford: I had received a letter from my uncle requiring my attendance at the Lodge; I found him alone. Lord Stafford had been some time in Portugal for his health; my uncle had some business of importance to transact with him, and he had chosen me for his deputy. He wished me to remain twelve months abroad, that I might see the country; he appointed me a servant from his own family for my attendant, and gave me a handsome sum for my equipment. He took an affectionate leave of me, bidding me set off immediately for Falmouth to get a passage by the first ship. Nothing hurt me at leaving England but the thoughts of not

having taken leave of Emily. I wrote her a long letter from Falmouth; I explained to her the haste which my uncle's business required, and I bade her take care of her health, and depend on my constancy.

I had a safe and speedy voyage to Lisbon: I found Lord Stafford in that city. He received me politely; he considered me as the heir of his brother, and he thought me not unworthy the notice of his daughters. Lord Stafford had been a widower many years. He had a son and two daughters. His son was in England. My cousins behaved to me with the greatest civility; but there was too much of system in their manners, and too much of art in their persons, for them to suit my unvitiated taste. Lord Stafford would fain have had me remain with him during the twelve months allotted to my

my absence ; but I respected the injunctions I had received too much not to fulfil them ; and as soon as I had settled the original purpose of my journey, I departed on my route. My absence was brightened by the letters I frequently received from Emily. In her first she told me that Louisa had taken her to the Lodge, and introduced her to my uncle, hoping that their company would enliven him during my absence. " Kind, good Louisa !" cried I, " how ungrateful have I often been to thee ? You will interest my uncle for his nephew's choice ; he does not value money, and the birth of Emily is not beneath his own."

The letters of Emily were less frequent ; her last I received about two months before my return : in it she mentioned my sister having married a Mr. Fitzpatrick, whom she

had met at the house of a City friend ; that my uncle had at first exhibited a strong dislike to the match, but that, on its having taken place, he had received her into his favour, imputing the blame to himself in suffering her to have acquaintance in the City.

“ Mr. Fitzpatrick is old enough to be the father of your sister,” said Emily ; “ but he is very rich, and a Nabob.”

The *but* did not please me. I read and re-read the paragraph.

“ And do you, Emily,” cried I, “ do you think immense wealth so necessary ? Ah ! how do you then expect to find happiness with Stafford ? ”

I did not hear again from Emily ; but I did not wonder at it, as I had written to her that I was about to leave Portugal, and to
return

return home. I had kept up a constant correspondence with a College friend every way worthy of my esteem. Ah Miriam! it is at his lodgings that I now write; it is through my rashness he is driven here; that he is——But let me not anticipate. To Merton I mentioned my intended return; and with all the zeal of true friendship he met me at Falmouth. He embraced and held me warmly to his breast; there was something unusually impressive in his manner. It was evening when I arrived, and we sat down to a social meal. After supper Merton seemed unusually to press the glass. I knew him to be a temperate man, but imagined that he was exhilarated with joy at my return, and knew not how to repress his buoyant spirits. I can now see through the kindness of his motive; but, alas!

Merton, how nearly had the effects been fatal to thee ! I had drank more than my usual quantity—my blood was in a state of ferment ; Merton attempted to speak ; he seemed labouring to ease a full mind, but he stopped, and filled my glass.

“ Only this one, my friend,” said I.

“ Well,” answered he, laughing ; “ but let this be a bumper.”

“ Then it must be to my Emily.”

“ Your Emily ?” said Merton, impatiently.

“ Yes, my Emily—my Emily Melville.”

“ Why not say any one’s Emily ?” said Merton ; “ it would have done as well.”

“ No,” cried I, warmly, “ it would not, for she is wholly and solely mine.”

“ Ah Stafford !” said Merton, “ take care, if——”

“ If,” said I, rising from my seat;
“ what mean your dark suggestions? If
what, if what? Speak, Merton, instantly!”
The wine had already begun to operate in
my head; a burning fever circulated through
my frame.

“ If she should prove unworthy——”

“ Who dares breathe a doubt of her
worthiness,” cried I, “ shall dearly pay the
forfeit.”

“ I do,” said Merton, calmly, “ and I
will prove it.”

“ You are a liar,” cried I; and walking
to a side-table, I took my case of pistols,
which had been placed there with my lug-
gage. “ Prove it,” cried I, “ instantly
prove her unworthiness, or instantly pay the
forfeit.”

“ Rash-

“Rash Stafford!” cried Merton; “fit down, and hear me.”

He endeavoured to seize the pistols; in our struggle one of them went off, and with a deep groan Merton fell to the ground.

“Fly, fly, Henry!” cried he, “and save yourself.”

Good God! what were the emotions of that minute!—Oh Miriam! as you read my story, pity, Oh pity my impetuous haste. I ordered a chaise: I set out instantly from Falmouth, and, without knowing what I did, travelled post till I reached Exeter. The image of my wounded, perhaps ere this, my dead friend was continually before my eyes; yet I had no idea of providing for my own safety: I did not think of absconding, and my only thought was how to find out where Emily was, and if my friend
had

had deceived me. As I stopped to change horses, I recollected that probably my sister and her husband might be paying a visit at the Lodge. I hastily ordered the postillion to take me there ; it was not above twenty miles. I had travelled the whole night without taking any refreshment, and the day was again closing ere I reached Stafford Lodge. As I approached the house, I observed there were many lights issuing from the windows ; and fearing there might be an assemblage of company, I stopped at the park gate, and bidding the postillion await my return, I hastily ran to the house. I met a servant.—“ Where is my uncle ? ” said I.

“ In the drawing-room, Sir,” was the answer, “ with his Lady.”

“ With whom ? ” cried I.

“ Do

“Do you not know that my master is married, Sir?” and the drawing-room door was put open. On a sofa alone sat Emily Melville. I entered; I approached. She shrieked; she hid her head.—“Oh Emily! have I frightened you?” cried I; “my own Emily, look up.”

“Leave me,” cried she, faintly; “leave me: I am your uncle’s wife!”

“Heavenly Powers!” said I, sighing, almost groaning, “and for thee have I killed my friend!”—I was rushing out of the room.

“Stay, Stafford,” cried she, “stay; your uncle will be soon within, and——”

“And do you think, Madam, that I can coolly contemplate the cause of my ruin—my destruction? No, I must fly to snatch a friend from the arms of Death, or to yield myself a willing sufferer!”

Again

Again Emily shrieked, but I attended not. I rushed out of the house : I crossed the park, and again got to my chaise.

“ Where will you go now ? ” said the driver.

“ Any where—to Exeter,” cried I, throwing myself into the chaise.

Oh ! who can describe the conflicts that warred in my agonized frame—disappointed pride, ill-requited friendship, the death of Merton ! Ah ! on that I could not reflect, and the tumult, the distraction of my mind were insupportable ; yet I could not remain on one spot. I dared not reflect ; I dreaded to anticipate ; and when the driver set me down at Exeter, I got a fresh chaise, and travelled post till I reached Y——, in my way to Falmouth.—“ Oh Merton ! Merton ! ” cried I, “ let me but receive your forgiveness,
and

and then I shall die contented."—Yet my weakened frame could no longer support itself, and I sunk motionless on the floor of the inn at Y—— while a fresh chaise was procuring. Delirium seized my brain, and I was conveyed to bed, where exhausted nature sunk into a stupor. I awoke ; it was midnight ; the silence, the gloom aided my already frantic senses. I hastily arose. Madness fired my brain ; I wandered I knew not whither. Night came, and still I knew not where I wandered. I flung myself on the grass in deep despair. Another day dawned on my aching head, my burning bosom. Oh Miriam ! I approached a precipice : I dared to meditate on self-destruction. The foaming ocean rolled beneath me, the clouds grew black and tempestuous over my head ! Yet a guardian angel was at hand, and I

was

was rescued and protected, and by her balmy voice was soothed to reason!—Let me stop, let me reflect on the gentle softness which stole over my wearied frame, which composed my frenzied mind, which cooled my burning bosom, and which once more let me hear the voice of Reason!—Oh Miriam! can I ever forget the hour when you led me to the Castle? No, unceasing is my gratitude—lasting, everlasting is the impression I then received; and till this heart shall cease to beat, the memory of that night shall be entwined around it, nourished as the dearest hour of my existence!

In calm reflection I passed some hours on the pillow which you had prepared for me; the madness of my conduct appeared in striking colours—the worthlessness of Emily, the frivolity of that mind, which
could

could prefer the gratifications of shew and splendour to the decided choice of her heart; for had I not heard her declare me such, even before I myself had indulged a thought of the kind? And could she thus sacrifice the dearest affections of the heart?—"Ah, Merton! Merton!" thought I, "to what have I sacrificed you!"

My ruminations were followed by a determination of setting out with the morning light for Falmouth, in hopes that Merton might yet live; if he did not—ah, Miriam! that *if* again almost consigned me to the dark regions of despair: yet ere I closed my eyes, I dared to petition Heaven for the happiness of that solitary being, who, alone and unprotected, was worthy to be transplanted to the richest soil. Sleep, refreshing sleep, once more visited my burning eyelids.

lids. I awoke calm, collected, and reasonable. I sighed as I left the Castle.—“Heaven for ever bless the gentle Miriam!” issued from my grateful lips as I passed the great gate. I hastened to Y——. When I arrived there my impatience knew no bounds. I travelled post till I reached Falmouth. I could scarcely ask the question; but the answer “He lives,” was too much for my already agitated frame. I was obliged to remain some hours before I could obtain resolution to visit my friend. Ah! what a meeting! Pale and exhausted, supported by pillows, Merton extended his faded hand. I caught it; I pressed it to my lips, but I could not speak.

“You are convinced, Stafford?” said Merton, mildly.

“Yes,”

“Yes,” said I, “I am convinced that for a woman who merited not a thought, I have murdered an invaluable friend! Oh Merton——”

“Compose yourself,” said Merton; “my surgeons assure me that I am out of danger, and I am equally blamable with yourself.”

My own servant had attended Merton during my absence. I now took his place, and feeling I owed an apology to my uncle for my mad appearance, and my hasty departure from the Lodge, I wrote to him, and dispatched my servant with the letter. I informed him that just as I reached his house, an express had overtaken me, to acquaint me that the life of my friend Merton was in imminent danger, and that I was obliged to set off immediately to attend him. I owed
my

my uncle innumerable obligations ; his affection, his care, his kindness had ever been uniform, and I resolved to appear before him as I ought, and to divest myself of every kind of embarrassment when I appeared before his wife, who I hoped had sufficiently reflected on the step she was about to take when she married the uncle, to have conquered every spark of regard, if she ever felt any, for the nephew.

I received a kind answer from my uncle ; he bade me come to him in London when the life of my friend was ensured. Merton soon recovered ; but, though his wounds were healed, his frame was still weak. He removed some miles off into the country, and I obeyed my uncle's commands. So much had Mrs. Stafford's conduct disgusted me, that my hand did not experience much
trepidation

trepidation as it touched the knocker of my uncle's door.

I found him alone.—“Mrs. Stafford is gone with your sister and Mr. Fitzpatrick into Cornwall,” said he; “I am soon to join them, and you shall accompany me, Henry. You remember Miss Melville; her family is ancient, her manners gentle, and I feel my happiness much increased by having made her my wife.”

I felt my face redden. My uncle was not much accustomed to read the countenance, yet he discerned the alteration in mine; but he imputed it to a wrong cause.

“You shall not suffer, Henry,” cried he; “and, though I have secured a handsome provision to Mrs. Stafford, yet——”

“Oh,

“ Oh my dear Sir ! suspect me not of a mercenary thought ; far, far from me be an interested idea. If your happiness be augmented, I shall participate in it.”

My uncle seemed affected.—“ Your sister,” said he, “ ah, Henry ! I had a struggle here,” laying his hand on his heart, “ ere I could resolve to receive a nephew in Mr. Fitzpatrick ; low-bred, and purse-proud, he ought to have remained for ever distinct from the Staffords ! But I should not have suffered your sister to have mixed with plebeians, and I felt grateful to her for promoting my union with her friend.”

The treachery of Louisa made me shudder. I now saw that deep pique to me had been the latent cause of all her behaviour ; that she had hoped to have destroyed my happiness, and to have ruined my prospects

for ever : but I resolved to shew both the *smiling deceivers* that they had not power to affect my peace. I felt my soul steeled against them, while it melted to tenderness at the thoughts of a benignant angel, whom I might perhaps again meet in the part of the world to which I was going. My uncle travelled with speed ; towards the evening of the third day we approached a castle. The avenue, the courtway, the gates, the porch—my heart beat high with fluttering palpitation. I eagerly asked how long the castle had been in the possession of my new brother ?

“ A very short time,” was my uncle’s answer.

“ Ah !” thought I, “ then the charming genius of the place no longer graces it with her presence.”

I entered

I entered the drawing-room. I hastily paid my respects to the ladies. The malicious glances of my sister were insupportable; the confusion of Mrs. Stafford was apparent. I turned from them in disorder. On whom did my eyes then fix? Oh Miriam! I scarcely knew what to do; my whole soul was at my lips: yet the recent proof I had received of the intriguing talents of my sister restrained me, and I resolved to leave my explanation for a private hour. Alas! when did that hour come? You avoided me, Mrs. Stafford watched me, my sister's malevolence missed no opportunity of confusing me; she had the power of keeping Mrs. Stafford in a state of mental misery, and I too soon saw that Emily, weak and inconstant, watched me with the eyes of jealous suspicion.

Candid, ingenuous Miriam ! say, was not my situation particularly distressing ? I respected my uncle with a respect, a regard almost filial. I feared that he would discover in his favoured nephew the underminer of his domestic happiness. I beheld you with sentiments indefinable to myself—all that the highest veneration, the warmest gratitude, the tenderest—— But whither am I running ? You, Miriam, you thought me a dissembler, a deceiver, one unworthy the smallest portion of your attention, of a shadow of regard. You had discovered the embarrassment of Mrs. Stafford's manner towards me, and how could you possibly divine the cause ? My conduct wore the appearance of mystery, and I found no opportunity for an explanation.—In the meantime Mrs. Stafford assumed an air of tenderness, of softness
when

when she addressed me; which had power (fearing what I feared—fearing to destroy my uncle's peace of mind) to fill me with the deepest confusion; my sister's vigilance never slept; she saw every thing, and her eyes were frequently turned towards you and Mortimer with a look of anxious enquiry. I caught the infection; a variety of emotions assailed me, and the evening before I went to the assembly at Y——, when I saw Mortimer——But no matter. An opportunity offered at Y——; yet, prejudiced against me, you would not hear me. I remained at the Castle; I felt that I could not, yet that I ought to quit it; every day the interest that my presence excited in Mrs. Stafford was more perceptible, and every day I felt myself a coward when I meditated leaving the spot, which contained——

You were taken ill—your seizure was alarming. I heard that you were to become the wife of the low-bred Jason; this I did not credit.—My anxiety for her who had been my guardian angel, was discovered by Mrs. Stafford. Jealousy—dare I write the word?—yes, jealousy took possession of her bosom; that person, who had for ever forfeited my regard, dreaded to behold another in the possession of it. Oh what a weak mind is her's!—I heard you were better, and I resolved to leave the Castle—to leave you, Miriam, exposed to a host of dangers, rather than, by staying, render Mrs. Stafford's conduct obvious to the whole house, and wound the breast which had nurtured me. I kept my intended departure secret: I had not myself fixed on the time, but a circumstance soon happened which quickly
made

made me decide: The evening before I left the Castle, I stood indulging my ruminations in that room where I last beheld you, where I last spoke to you, when Mrs. Stafford approached me. She took my hand. "Say, Stafford," cried she, "that you forgive your Emily!"

"I can harbour no resentment against the wife of my uncle," said I.

Mrs. Stafford burst into tears.—"Oh Henry!" said she, "did you but know how I reproach myself, how for one short period of vanity I am punished, you would, indeed you would pity me!"

"I hope, Madam," cried I, "that you will never become a pitiable object; exert your reason, and you will see the weakness of indulging unavailing retrospection."

I was leaving the room.—“Oh Stafford! cruel Stafford!” cried she, “and do you deny me one moment’s conversation, while this,” she took a red Morocco case from her pocket, “while this inanimate resemblance of you is the only comfort of my existence? In contemplating it I lose the remembrance of my sorrows; but it is a dangerous indulgence.”

I now found that the only chance I had of curing this miserable weakness in Mrs. Stafford was to wound her self-love. “Here,” said I, taking her portrait from my pocket, “here is your resemblance; I have never opened it since it has become the right of another, and I take this opportunity of returning it to you.”

She warded it off with her hand; she covered her face, and in broken accents said,

“Oh

“ Oh to what a humiliation have I exposed myself!”

“ This is a duty I owe to myself and my uncle,” said I; and confused and agitated, I again advanced, and put the picture in her hand. She received it with sobs, with broken sighs. My heart smote me for the seeming cruelty of my conduct—my heart, which was conscious of her never having been its possessor; but I felt assured that I was acting properly, and to spare Mrs. Stafford any farther humiliation, to save the peace of my honoured uncle, I left the Castle when every emotion of my heart detained me.

Ah Miss St. Ledger! I dare not go on; you know the madness of my subsequent conduct—conduct for which I shall never cease to reproach myself.

And now what am I about to write? I am about to say adieu to the woman who has been interesting herself in the few incidents of my life. I know not what I would say. Oh Miriam! at this agonizing moment, when I am about to separate myself from all that my soul holds dear, about to quit the object of my warmest regard—at this moment how hard do I find it to obey the stern dictates of honour! Now, when my explanations are made, when all mystery has vanished, when you, lovely Miriam, have promised me an introduction to Mr. Seymour, now to leave you—Oh Miriam, 'tis mental agony!—Yet ought I, can I stay? Can I each moment drink deeper draughts of that poison which will undermine my peace? for, ah! am I not destitute, dependant? Can I, dare I seek to gain your affections
without

without a prospect of making your felicity? Oh no, no, I feel I cannot. I remember my poor mother cut off in the midst of her days, and I should despise myself if I could purchase my own happiness (for would it not be happiness the most supreme?) at the expence of your peace of mind. My uncle is generous, is noble; but—I cannot go on.

“No,” cried Miriam, “no, Stafford, I too well know to what that insuperable *but* alludes. Poor, poor Miriam, thou art the offspring of poverty, perhaps of peasants!”—Some time elapsed ere Miriam could finish the perusal.——

Farewel then, most generous of women! Farewel, thou much—Oh how much esteemed Miriam! Judge me not too harshly. Forget me not. Banish me not, wholly from

your remembrance, for in my memory your image will be ever cherished. May Heaven pour its choicest blessings on your head! May you long continue under the protection of Mr. Seymour, and when some happy man, the blessed object of—Once more farewell!—

HENRY STAFFORD."

CHAP. V.

“ For thee I’ll lock up all the gates of love,

“ And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,

“ To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE wafting taper had long informed Miriam of the lapse of time. She heeded it not; but with her hands folded, her head bent on her bosom, and the open packet on her lap, she continued sitting in musing melancholy till the orient streaks threw their glow over the apartment.

To

To find Stafford cleared, exculpated from every unworthy action, to see through his whole letter marks of the most animated, the most undisguised preference for her, and yet at the same time to read his scarcely legible adieu, all these emotions, contradictory and various, were warring in her agitated bosom. To have his character cleared, to have his regard avowed at the moment in which he was about to separate from her, perhaps for ever—the thought of his worth, which at any other period would have filled her whole soul with the supreme happiness, now seemed to add to the poignancy of her regrets: and while she whispered to herself, “Stafford is worthy of my regard,” when she added, “but he leaves me, he flies me!” the tears burst in torrents from her watchful eyes.

Ashtamed

Asbamed of indulging her feelings, our heroine at length sought her pillow ; but her feelings were not to be left behind, and she still meditated on the letter she had been reading.—“ Ah, Stafford! Stafford!” thought she, “ if you indeed loved me, would you not brave the opposition of your uncle—the — Good God! and am I then really grown so interested, so selfish—could I suffer him for a moment to act contrary to the wishes of him who has been his father? Oh Miriam! how low must thou be fallen, if indeed thou canst wish that for your sake he should condemn the advice of Mr. Stafford, and entirely darken his own prospects!”

The sober sense, the reason of Miriam soon dispersed the mists which had been gathering in her mind in the first moments of disappointed hope; she now saw how
irremediable,

irremediable, how unavoidable would be the ruin of Stafford, did he, in defiance of his uncle, make her his wife. Bred up to no profession, how was it possible for him to procure a maintenance? The Army alone held out a prospect of the kind: alas! the Army had already been fatal to his father. Would not his fate continually recur to the mind of his son, and would not the miseries of disobedience be impressed, forcibly impressed on his quick and impetuous disposition?

“ In my short journey through life,” cried Miriam, “ have I not already seen two instances, two melancholy instances of disobedience? Were they not held up to me as beacons? Ah Miriam! take warning by them. Oh! had Miss St. Ledger not contemned the wishes of her friends, she had
escaped

escaped a watery grave ! Had the mother of Stafford listened to the voice of prudence, her ashes might have lain in her native earth !” Yes, thou noble Stafford of my heart’s election, I will act so as to deserve thee ; you can attend to the stern dictates of honour in the moment of tumultuous passion : Oh let me not be left behind thee ! Let me also conquer every emotion which wars against rectitude and propriety of conduct ; but let me still cherish thy remembrance, thy virtues near my heart.”

I should weary my readers were I to follow our heroine through her ruminations. She arose unrefreshed by sleep, and her countenance shewed that she had a silent sorrow, for silent she had resolved it should remain. What comfort could she derive from communicating its source to her
generous

generous protector ? If she gave him the letter of Stafford to peruse, would he not be made acquainted with the scandal of the world, and would not his susceptible bosom be deeply wounded at the invidious reports which had been circulated ? Would he not be pained at reading the regard of Stafford for his favourite, without being able to do any thing to forward their happiness ? for did he not still bewail the miseries which his own clandestine conduct had produced ? Would he not read in the eyes of his Miriam, that she suffered under the influence of a hopeless passion ; and would not his pitying looks, his soothing voice, fill her at once with shame, concern, and confusion ? Yet still Miriam was unwilling to have concealments, and still did she feel a pang at her heart

heart when she reflected on the light in which her present residence was beheld by the world. Yet what could she do? Could she leave the disinterested being, who had saved her perhaps from the severest misfortunes, from extreme penury and want, without being able to assign a reason for her conduct, without having any motive attached to it but the vilest ingratitude, but the extreme of depravity? What would the gentle Henrietta say at losing her beloved companion?—"Ah no," cried she, clasping her hands, "it is impossible: I can quietly bear the world's contumely, but I cannot quietly leave my valued friends. No," appropriating a passage in her favourite poem of the Grave, to her present situation.

"To

———" To run away

" Is but a coward's trick : to run away

" From this world's ills, that at the very worst

" Will soon blow o'er, thinking to mend ourselves

" By boldly vent'ring on a world unknown,

" And plunging headlong in the dark—'tis mad :

" No frenzy half so desperate as this."

" And surely, were I to leave my present situation in dread of the world's malevolence, it would be the desperation of a maniac."

Miriam tried to reason with herself; she endeavoured to be consoled for the absence of Stafford, yet she felt that it required all her fortitude, all her reason, all her exertion; and though she appeared before Mr. Seymour with an air of complacency, though she contrived, in a careless manner, to say that Mr. Stafford had sent her a complimentary message on being obliged to quit Clifton, yet in her solitary moments she could not help yielding to melan-

melancholy retrospection. When she took her usual walks with Henrietta, she insensibly pursued the most retired, the most unfrequented paths ; she dreaded to be noticed, and she imagined that every stranger looked at her with enquiring eyes, and that every one united in believing her a being lost to character, and destitute of principle.

How do our ideas deceive us ! The native modesty, the delicacy of Miriam prejudiced almost every beholder in her favour. Mr. Seymour lived retired ; he was a stranger at Clifton, and though some of those summer insects, who rove from place to place in search of variety and chit-chat, might have heard, and tried to propagate a tale of slander, yet the majority of the company at Clifton believed Miriam and Henrietta to be the two wards of Mr. Seymour ; and while poor Miriam fancied she saw severity and sarcasm
lurking

lurking under every eye which met her's, perhaps admiration or curiosity were the only feelings she excited.

Mr. Seymour possessed much penetration and discernment; tremblingly anxious for the happiness of those around him, he soon discovered that all was not as it should be in the bosom of Miriam;—he heard the repressed sigh, he marked the absent manner, and perceiving she withheld her confidence from him, he anxiously sought to divine the cause of her uneasiness, that he might endeavour to remove it. The thoughts of Mr. Seymour were almost constantly engaged on this subject, and at length he imagined he had discovered the source of his *protegée's* uneasiness. He remarked that the alteration in her manner had taken place at the time of Henry Stafford's appearance at Clifton;

he

he had seen the colour rise in her cheek ; he had seen her lip quiver when she mentioned his name ; and he attributed her apparent disquietude to a hopeless passion, to unrequited attachment. The longer Mr. Seymour reflected on the subject, the more was this idea strengthened ; and he beheld, with the most tender pity, a young and lovely creature thus yielding herself a victim to a destructive passion.

“ Would fortune purchase her happiness,” cried Mr. Seymour, mentally, “ how easily could I bestow it ! but, alas ! all the treasures of the East will not purchase the affections of the heart. No, gentle, tender Miriam ! I will sooth, I will protect thee : I will cheer thee through thy toilsome journey, but I cannot obtain for thee the heart of him you love ; and feeling, knowing the impossibility

fibility of this, I will never wound thy delicacy by letting thee know thy secret is discovered to me."

Anxious to extirpate from the mind of Miriam all its secret grief, Mr. Seymour exerted himself unusually. He said that, finding his health much strengthened, and his spirits good, he was resolved that he would no longer be a recluse, and he called on Henrietta and Miriam to accompany him the following Tuesday to the ball.

Henrietta smiled assent. Miriam tried to imitate her; but her smile had more of sorrow than of pleasure in it. It was noticed by Mr. Seymour; but he had resolved to be silent, although, to use the words of the holy Psalmist, "it was pain and grief to him."

Miriam

Miriam languidly arrayed herself for the ball. Mr. Seymour had presented both his young favourites with elegant new dresses, exactly similar, to be worn on this occasion ; yet never, though their outward appearance was the same, was there a greater contrast of feelings than those which occupied the bosoms of our belles as, accompanied by Mr. Seymour, they entered the ball-room.

Henrietta, sprightly, careless, and sanguine, was unusually animated. She was particularly fond of dancing, and her heart bounded as she caught the first notes of the dance which was playing at their entrance.

Miriam was depressed, low, and dispirited ; she fancied all eyes were turned on her, on Henrietta, or Mr. Seymour, and her ear seemed waiting to catch the malevolent words of those who dared to breathe their

flanderous aspersions. She scarcely attempted to look around her, or to lift up her head; she believed herself the object of scorn and opprobrium, and not a being had power to interest her: for he, to whom alone she had been justified, for whom alone she felt anxious, he was far, far away.

Lost in melancholy reverie, Miriam scarcely knew that Henrietta and Mr. Seymour were at the other end of the room till she was roused by the voice of a gentleman. She turned her head, but though she perfectly recognized his countenance, she had not the most indistinct idea of his name, or of the place where she had beheld him. He appeared about twenty-six years of age; his person was graceful, his countenance was pale and fallow, and exhibited traits of recent indisposition.—“Ah, Madam!” said

he,

he, "I should have been too much flattered by your recognition of me : a stage-coach acquaintance merely would not have licensed this freedom ; but I have another claim on you, Miss St. Ledger, for by that name I have heard you spoken of."

Miriam started; she scarcely breathed. The gentleman continued.—"My name is Merton ; my friend Stafford has already, I believe, mentioned me to you."

"He has mentioned you," cried Miriam, forgetting all common forms as she contemplated the emaciated figure and wan cheeks of Merton, "as the noblest of mortals, as the most generous of friends."

"I shall now," said Merton, bowing impressively as she spoke, and yet trying to change the subject, "I shall now see whether your two friends, (on whom I can have no

other claim than what the stage-coach authorises), whether they will kindly bestow a smile upon me. But here they come; to you I could venture to introduce myself, but for form's sake I will apply to the master of the ceremonies to name me to Mr. Seymour, and to solicit for me the hand of the blooming Hebe who accompanies him."

Merton was then rising, when Miriam said, with much agitation in her voice, which she vainly tried to help, "Pray, Mr. Merton, where is—— Have you—has your friend written since——"

"No," said Merton, in a softened tone, immediately catching her meaning, and endeavouring to obviate her confusion, "no, he has not. When he quitted me, his destination was London. I imagine that I shall hear from him in a day or two."

Merton

Merton then went to the master of the ceremonies, and Mr. Seymour and Henrietta soon joined our heroine. There was a bevy of people standing near her, and by them her conversation with Merton had been screened from the view of Mr. Seymour. Mr. Pennington now advanced to them, and presenting Mr. Merton, requested the hand of Henrietta for him in the dance.

“ Bless me !” cried Henrietta, “ do you not know him, Sir ?” turning to Mr. Seymour ; “ this is the gentleman who travelled with us to Exeter the other day.”

The animated eyes of Merton shewed the delight which ran through his whole frame at the quick recollection of Henrietta. Mr. Seymour took him cordially by the hand, and “ nothing loth,” he led off his smiling partner.

“ I am pleased at meeting this gentleman,” said Mr. Seymour. “ Mr. Pennington would not have introduced him had he not been worthy of notice. I was prejudiced in his favour the last time we met, although he was reserved and silent.”

“ He then appeared in ill health,” answered Miriam ; “ and even now I think he ought to be careful of fatiguing himself by dancing.”

Miriam felt a secret pleasure at being known to the bosom friend of Stafford ; she perceived the flattering opinion he already entertained of her, and she hoped that in his introduction to Mr. Seymour she should have an opportunity of forming an acquaintance with him. The pleasure he derived from the conversation, from the smiles of the modest, the unconscious

Henrietta,

Henrietta, was apparent; and Miriam secretly wished that the attractive charms of her young friend might fix the affections of Merton.—“Sterling merit, such as his, must ensure her happiness,” thought she: and while engaged in these pleasing meditations, they infused some portion of complacency into her countenance; her eyes were once more lifted up in modest satisfaction, and her whole appearance was changed. Mr. Seymour observed her, and was delighted that he had prevailed on her to join the gay circle; he at length consented, at her earnest desire, to leave her, and make one at a whist table, where his company had been requested.

Miriam, again left alone, was looking round at the company, when a gentleman advanced to her, whose deep mourning and

unpowdered hair shewed that he had lost a near relative. She looked at him intently for a moment, and was not displeased when she discovered that it was Mortimer. He eagerly took her hand; the colour rose in his cheek, but he soon acquired his usual ease, and expressed himself in the most animated manner at the pleasure he experienced in again meeting her.

Miriam felt a momentary confusion when their last interview came across her mind; but she had always entertained a kind of partiality for Mortimer, and she answered his warm compliments with modest civility.

“ You look at my sable habiliments,” cried Mortimer, “ but you have too much delicacy to ask for whom I wear them. I have lost my uncle, Miss St. Ledger; a stroke of apoplexy carried him off very suddenly.

suddenly. It was a great shock to me ; he had ever treated me affectionately ; he has acted munificently by me ; and I forget his peculiarities, and remember only his virtues."

" Did Mr. Caxon breathe his last at the Castle ?" said Miriam, echoing the sigh of Mortimer.

" Oh no ! he had left it a great while," answered Mortimer. " He died in London, whither he pursued his runaway nephew ; and by him I learned that you also had quitted Tunacombe."

" Good Heavens !" cried Miriam ; " why surely, Mr. Mortimer, you were there at the time I left it ?"

" I hardly know whether I was, or not. Ah, Miss St. Ledger ! you were my guardian angel. Did I not tell you that your

counsels, your advice should not be thrown away on me? When indeed could you counsel or advise in vain? Shall I confess to you that my only method was flight? I could not stay without accepting the lady's challenge, and I left the Castle, and, attended by my servant, on the succeeding morning——”

“How strange! how singular!” said Miriam.

“Very much so indeed,” said Mortimer. “I left no account of myself: I did not write to my uncle. I took possession of his house in town, and was much surprised to see him unexpectedly break into the study one morning; but how great was my consternation when he asked me if I had had a companion in my flight! I will not wound your ears by the invidious surmises which three elopements at the same time had caused at the
Castle!

Castle ! How little did my uncle know you—how ignorant was he of the dignity, the purity of Miriam St. Ledger, when he could suspect her of eloping either with Henry Stafford or myself!—I am giving you a long detail ; but, lovely Miriam, I have longed, I have panted for an opportunity of pouring out my whole soul to you—of telling you what a change you have effected in this heretofore unreflecting heart.—My uncle died about a fortnight since. Eager to fly from a melancholy house, I left London. I have been at this place ten days. This is my first appearance in public. How singularly fortunate do I think myself in thus encountering you ; for believe me I have been very anxious to gain some intelligence of you.—And now may I ask with whom you are at present ?”

Miriam answered with openness and candour; she mentioned the cause of her leaving the Castle, and her fortunate meeting with a protector in Mr. Seymour, and a companion in his ward. At that moment Henrietta and Merton approached her.—“Pray,” said Mortimer, “name me to your friend.”—Miriam did so, and again performed the same ceremony to Mr. Seymour, who appeared delighted to find that Miriam had discovered an old acquaintance.

Mortimer strenuously insisted on our heroine’s dancing with him the two following dances, and she cheerfully assented;—her heart was more at ease than it had for some time been; the introduction of Merton to her acquaintance, and the knowledge of Mortimer’s merit—merit which she had always allotted him, animated her unusually; and

and she was no longer the Miriam whom Mortimer had seen at the Castle, or the languid, the dispirited Miriam he had beheld at the Y—— Caffino. Her brow was placid and serene, the smiles dimpled round her mouth, and she even felt an emotion of regret when Mr. Seymour told her he was ready to depart; yet as he wished the two gentlemen a good night, he gave them a cordial invitation to his house. The smiling Henrietta seemed to second the invitation; nor did the countenance of Miriam intimate that she wished to put a negative upon it: and thus had our heroine derived both pleasure and comfort from a ball which she expected could bring with it nothing but weariness and disgust.—How often through life do we experience the truth of this observation! Parties, entertainments, and visits, from
which

which we expected to derive the greatest delight, drag on in painful insipidity, or languid inanity ; while those which we think of with dislike, and enter with reluctance, afford us real pleasure and satisfaction.

Miriam had learned from Mortimer that Mr. and Mrs. Stafford were at the Lodge, and that Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick were returned to London, all reports of a dissolution of Parliament having died away. Mortimer said he had not seen them after their arrival in town, and Miriam had sufficient penetration to discover that his flight from Tunacombe had caused his irretrievable disgrace with the high-spirited Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who was not to be slighted with impunity ; but the idea of at last being enabled to write to the simple-hearted Joanna, to inform her of the ease and comfort in
which

which she lived, and to enclose her a memorial of her gratitude—this reflection added yet more to the tranquillity of Miriam, and, after her return home, she enjoyed that uninterrupted repose which is so powerful a renovator of the human frame.

Miriam arose early, and immediately wrote to her humble friend. The munificence of Mr. Seymour had made her rich indeed; and she enclosed in her letter a bank bill for twenty pounds, and having dispatched it to the post-office, she descended with a light step to the breakfast-room.

Mr. Seymour was delighted when he beheld her cheerful face; but he did not express himself by words. Henrietta looked the picture of content, and their party was soon augmented by the appearance of Mortimer. Merton quickly followed. The conversation

conversation was general, spirited, and interesting. Mr. Seymour was pleased with the liveliness and animation of Mortimer, and he listened attentively to the good sense and urbanity displayed in the opinions of Merton.

From this hour these gentlemen were daily visitors at Mr. Seymour's. Merton sought not to conceal that Henrietta was the object of his visits; that they were not disagreeable to her, was obvious. Her guardian perceived this with pleasure, as his enquiries respecting Merton had turned out highly advantageous to his character.

Mortimer's attention seemed exclusively turned towards Miriam;—at first she had received it with complacency, but of late his manner had insensibly changed, and he had fallen into a warmer and a more particular

cular method of expressing himself. Miriam felt alarmed. In vain did she assume more reserve, more coldness in her manner: Mortimer was not to be so checked; and our heroine too late discovered that she had been encouraging a lover, when she had imagined herself only listening to the conversation of a friend.

Merton had attained his seven-and-twentieth year without having ever felt the power of *la belle passion*.—Ah! shake your head, my sceptical fair one, but it is a fact. His opinion of women had not been very high; he had seen his friend Stafford egregiously duped by one: her want of stability, her inconstancy, had nearly cost him his life, and he had resolved to steel his heart against all feminine attraction. So, on perceiving a rosy mouth, a polished brow, a sparkling

sparkling eye, placed opposite him in a stage-coach as he travelled towards Clifton, he resolved to wrap himself up securely in his great coat, to keep a solemn taciturnity, and if at any moment he should apprehend danger from the artillery of the bright eyes before him, to lay his hand on his still painful side, and as he felt the pang caused by the impression, to remember that a female, a lovely female had occasioned it. Yet at some periods was he in danger of forgetting those heroic resolutions ; the artless looks of Henrietta, the simplicity of her manner involuntarily drew his attention, and he would mentally exclaim, " She is, she must be faultless ;" but his emotion would cause a gentle twinge ; he felt the monitor at his side, he attended to it, and would again envelope himself yet closer in his wrapping coat, and put on a graver look.

Henry

Henry Stafford had no reserves with Merton, and when he found that Miriam was protected by Mr. Seymour, an emotion of pleasure animated the breast of Merton; he even thought of the blooming girl whom he might probably meet again, and he vainly endeavoured to seek an introduction till the accidental meeting in the ball-room favoured his wishes. His wound had been healed some time; he could feel no more twinges from that quarter, and he had insensibly declared himself the lover of Henrietta ere he was conscious of feeling a passion for her.— And now I must beg my readers to accompany me while I pay a visit to Stafford Lodge.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

"Slander smil'd horribly to view

"How wide her conquests daily grew."

COTTON.

THE Honourable Mr. Stafford and his Lady had remained in their mansion some time uninterrupted by visitors; yet their retirement had not heightened their affection, or augmented their confidence in each other. Mr. Stafford was almost entirely engrossed by his own pursuits, and he soon perceived that his Lady did not possess any powers

powers for conversation, that her mind was uncultivated, and her notions very frivolous, so that he was often obliged to have recourse to his books even in her presence. Mrs. Stafford felt relieved by this conduct; she had a particular aversion to a *tête-à-tête* with her husband, and she generally felt a nervous tremor when Mr. Stafford laid down his book, "and addressed himself unto motion." Ever since the departure of Stafford from the Castle, she had given way to the attacks of melancholy. At first jealousy had implanted its scorpion sting in her bosom; but when she was convinced, by a letter from Stafford to his uncle, that he had not accompanied Miriam from the Castle, her misery was augmented, as she could no longer remain ignorant that to her own behaviour she ought to impute his disappearance.

Overwhelmed

Overwhelmed by a thousand torturing feelings, not one of which did she endeavour to subdue, she existed a perfect epitome of human wretchedness. Her appetite left her, the colour daily departed from her cheeks, her lips grew pale, and her whole time was occupied in contemplating the portrait of him to whom she had behaved so unworthily.

It is needless to mention in this place, for ere this my readers must be fully convinced of it, that Mrs. Fitzpatrick was deeply versed in cunning, dissimulation, and art in all the dark mazes of a bold, intriguing spirit. She had always hated her brother, despised her uncle, and held a sovereign contempt for Emily. Her own recent disappointment with Mortimer rankled at her heart; and as at present she could not fully revenge herself upon him, she resolved on completing the
ruin

ruin of her brother, and on undermining for ever the repose of her uncle. Poor Emily she saw was already her victim; but one would not satisfy her, and her malignancy soon rose triumphant. She had spies about her brother, her uncle, and Mortimer. She knew their every action. She had been lately informed of Miriam's residence; but she had been represented to her as the mistress of Mr. Seymour, as one who lived openly as such. The infamy of Miriam might have satisfied her; but hearing of the frequent visits of Mortimer, she sat down and wrote two letters. The low malice, and the mistake on which one of them was founded, defeated its purpose; the other—But we shall see; the first was addressed to Mr. Seymour.

THE

THE LETTER.

“ For a man of your age, you really possess great charms, or have a most immoderate share of vanity ! Are you really blind ? Pray let me take the veil from before your eyes. Do you not perceive that you are not exclusively in possession of your idol ? The beauteous Miriam may contrive to blind you by her blandishments and allurements, but the youthful Mortimer is in possession of that heart which you foolishly imagine wholly and solely your’s. For shame ! do not suffer yourself to be thus duped. Who would keep a mistress in the eclat you do, and let another share her favours ? Rouse yourself, keep a watchful
eye,

eye, and revenge yourself on your rival for your Miriam's inconstancy.—Take the advice, receive the warning of a real friend, and as you follow it, so may you prosper !”

LETTER THE SECOND.

TO THE HONOURABLE MR. STAFFORD.

“A friend to the noble House of Stafford dares, humbly dares to solicit the attention of one of its honourable heads ; but the writer feels how unworthy he is of addressing Mr. Stafford, and his hand trembles : yet he cannot be silent, and see tamely, coolly see that family disgraced which has maintained its brilliancy through revolving centuries. Your nephew, your wife—ah ! start not—

VOL. II.

I

your

your favoured nephew, your beloved wife, they are unworthy of your regard.—Henry Stafford (how does he disgrace that name!) dares to behold your wife with the eyes of love. She has seen, she returns his passion. Suspect me not of falsehood: I will bring proofs. Watch Mrs. Stafford in her hours of retirement, inspect the object of her contemplations, dive into the cause of her tears; then remember me. Check, nip this destructive passion in the bud, for it has a canker near the heart. As you follow my advice, so may you prosper!”

Extreme depression had for some days unnerved the frame of Mrs. Stafford; she could scarcely support herself even in the presence of her husband, and she had retired to that grotto we have formerly noticed, and

was silently contemplating the inanimate resemblance of Stafford, when, casting her eyes towards the door, she beheld the stern, the angry countenance of her husband ! She tried to rise, but her knees smote each other, and she fell to the ground.

“ Emily,” said Mr. Stafford, in an awful tone, “ give me that picture ; and now tell me how have I deserved the stab which this conviction gives my heart ? How have I deserved that the death-stroke of my happiness should be pointed by the two beings I have most loved in the world ? ”

“ Oh on me let your maledictions fall !” cried Mrs. Stafford, “ for I am guilty ; but your nephew, he is——”

“Dare not to breathe his name, Madam!” said Mr. Stafford. “What, would you vindicate him to me? Never shall my eyes be
12 blasted

blasted by his sight—never shall my ears be wounded by his name !”

“ Oh say not so, in mercy say not so !” cried Mrs. Stafford, clasping his knees.

“ Miserable, infatuated woman, quit my presence till you can attain reason !” and in silent severity Mr. Stafford quitted her: but as he took the paper in his hand, which was to banish for ever from his house, from his presence, and from his regard, his hitherto fondly beloved nephew, the tear of wounded affection rose to his eye ; he hastily wiped away what he considered a degrading emotion, yet could he write only a few words.

“ When Henry Stafford beholds the portrait which these lines envelope, he will not be ignorant why he is for ever banished from the arms and the house of his once fond uncle ! A banker will have orders to
remit

remit him an annual sum, and the house in London is still open to him, for to London his uncle will not return. A letter in answer to this will not be opened : no vindication can exculpate such flagrant turpitude !

“ MONTAGUE STAFFORD.”

“ No,” cried Stafford, when he had read these lines, “ no, my dear, my honoured uncle, I will not attempt my vindication : I will not, to exculpate myself, open your eyes to the weakness, the frailty of her whom you unfortunately call your wife. Oh my virtuous uncle ! how can I bear to live under your displeasure ? Contemned, expelled by you, at a distance from her whom my soul adores, how is it possible I can exist ? Only conscious rectitude of intention can support me !”

These were the cogitations of Henry Stafford; and though he longed to fling himself at the feet of his uncle, though his heart ached to be at Clifton near the object of his love, though the last letter he had received from Merton informed him that he had a rival in Mortimer, yet he felt that he ought to remain where he was; and in irksome solitude he passed his hours, though surrounded by the "discordant din" of the metropolis.

Mr. Stafford deigned not again to open his lips on the subject to his miserable wife; his solemn taciturnity was awfully impressive, and the poor misguided Emily gradually sunk to that peaceful asylum of the wretched—the grave! A hectic arose in her cheek; her respiration grew daily more difficult, yet she complained not; and Mr. Stafford
observed

observed not the alteration. He met her only at meals ; for since the receipt of the poisoned letter, they had retired to separate apartments.

We will now leave them, and return to Mr. Seymour. That gentleman, having perused the incendiary letter, immediately threw it into the fire ; yet he sighed as he reflected on the malice of that world which delighted thus to put false constructions on the most single-hearted actions. An unusual pensiveness overspread his countenance, which was instantly observed by Miriam. She for some time vainly sought to divine the cause ; till, no longer able to resist her entreaties, Mr. Seymour said—" Envious of your virtues and my happiness, my delight in protecting you, a malignant spirit is gone abroad, a vile world try to blacken that

character which they dare not imitate, and a letter I have this instant put in the fire, has not had the power to wound; for its arrow is blunt, it is built without a foundation. Come, don't look serious, love—age as well as youth you see is attacked by calumny. But could the world imagine, (come near, Miriam, look with me in this glass), could the world ever imagine I meditated an union so preposterous as this?”

Miriam sighed as she learned that Mr. Seymour had at last heard the scandal of the day.

“Come, come,” continued Mr. Seymour, “dispel those clouds; I now feel strong enough to pay my visit to Mrs. Lester. If I read your countenance aright, you will not be sorry to accompany me. As to the beaux—but however they must bear a temporary absence.”

Miriam

Miriam blushed as Mr. Seymour laid an emphasis on the word *they*; but she assured him that she should with pleasure attend him. Of late she had felt particularly distressed by the attentions of Mortimer; she had perceived that Merton entertained a suspicion of his attachment for her, and he had said to her the evening before, in an impressive manner, as he accidentally heard a florid address of Mortimer's, "Ah, my poor Stafford!"

The sudden project of Mr. Seymour filled Merton with surprise, not unalloyed with a more painful emotion. Mortimer concealed not the regret with which he heard it, and he hastily left the house. The journey was to take place on the day after the succeeding one, and Miriam refused accompanying her party to the ball, that she

might not expose herself to the impetuosity of Mortimer. He was, however, not to be restrained or withheld from an interview; and giving a humble tap, he entered the house, and walked, unannounced, into the room where our heroine was sitting.—Miriam rose, saying, “Mr. Mortimer, I thought you had been at the ball!”

“Say rather you had hoped so,” cried Mortimer; “but be not uneasy, Miss Seymour: I entreat you to hear what I have to say.”

Miriam reseated herself, and attempted to listen without agitation. Mortimer began.

“Indulged from my infancy, and early taught to expect the fortune which I now enjoy, I fell into all the errors of youth, into all the licentious pursuits which so disgrace the young men of the present day.

No

No warning, no friendly voice checked my progress; and God knows into what a vortex I should have plunged, had not you, my guardian angel, restrained me. From the first moment I beheld you, you inspired me with sentiments before unknown; your counsels, your advice, were engraved indelibly on my heart; and when I again beheld you here, when I knew myself independent of all controul, I felt that if the purest veneration, if the warmest affection, if the highest reverence could deserve a place in your heart, that place I merited. Your hasty departure has expedited this avowal. Oh lovely Miriam! accept my hand, my fortune—direct, dispose of my future life—guide my actions in your own bright steps—assist me with your counsels. Oh! let not this be only an ideal prospect—let me read

the happy, the blessed certainty in your eyes—let me catch the enchanting accents from your lips. Say, adored Miriam!” cried he, snatching her hands, and holding them with fervour to his breast, “say you will hear my suit! Oh whence those gushing tears! Miriam, angelic Miriam! drive me not to distraction! Speak—say one word to ease my racking breast!”

“I will say,” said Miriam, “that the generosity, the explicitness of your offer, that your flattering preference fill me with the most painful gratitude—painful, because I feel it out of my power to accept your disinterested proposals.”

“Oh let me not hear such another word issue from those lips! Miriam, would you drive me to distraction? Would you retard your own work? Would you blight in the bud

but my feeble reason, my weak virtue? Retract the inhuman sentence, and say you will be my cheering guide, my bosom counsellor through life! With you nothing shall impede my progress in virtue; without you what would be life, youth, or fortune—what but a blank, a dreary void without you? Distraction is in the thought! Oh Miriam! can you not pity me?"

"I do indeed," cried Miriam; "but reflect, Mortimer, a moment reflect on what I say. How would you like to be united to a woman who had already——" She looked down, she blushed, she hesitated; her tongue seemed to recoil at the confession she was about to make.

"Who had already what?" cried Mortimer. "Speak, Oh Miriam! speak, I charge you!"

"Who

“Who had already unalienably bestowed her affections on another—on another from whom she is probably separated for ever, but whose image is ever present to her view!”—She covered her face with her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud.—“Oh Mortimer! could you be contented with the indifference of a wife, with at best a constrained affection? Oh no, no!”—Mortimer walked to a chair, and flinging himself into it, rested his head upon his hand.—Miriam continued—“Not a single being but yourself is acquainted with my partiality. Mortimer, you see my reliance on your honour; say then, answer me, am I cleared from the charge of ingratitude? Will you continue my friend?”

“You are an angel!” cried Mortimer; “and I shall ever continue the humble
adorer

adorer of such transcendent perfections ; even now I dare not stay—I dare not converse with you ; I shall forget every thing but—that I am the most unhappy of mortals !” cried he, as he clasped his hands together, and rushed out of the room.

“What have you done to Mortimer ?” said Mr. Seymour to Miriam when he returned from the ball. “He looked like a mad-man. He answered me *yes* and *no* fifty times in a minute, when, on his coming into the room so late, I asked him if he had been to see you.—Has he been leave-taking ?”

“Yes, no, yes,” said Miriam.

“Oh he has infected you I perceive,” said Mr. Seymour.

“Say rather he has affected me,” said Miriam. “Oh Sir ! he has made me the most noble, the most generous proposals, and I feel hurt that I cannot accept them.”

“And why cannot you,” said Mr. Seymour, “why cannot you accept them?”

“Ah, Sir!” said Miriam, “there is a cause, and one day you shall be made acquainted with it; but not yet—I feel I cannot.”

“Never unless you like it,” said Mr. Seymour, with emphasis; “your wishes shall never meet with opposition from me; they are always dictated by virtue.”

Henrietta then entered the room.

“Embrace our dear guardian for me,” cried Miriam.

Henrietta obeyed her, but the redness of her eyes proved that her affectionate heart had felt a pang at the thoughts of a separation from Merton; but Merton had spoken to Mr. Seymour, and on their return from

Cornwall

Cornwall he was to join the party at Bath or Clifton, and every thing was to be speedily settled for his union with Henrietta.

Merton had an affluent fortune, and a comfortable residence in Worcestershire; and the destiny of Henrietta seemed to be marked out under flattering auspices.

CHAP. VII.

“ A stately dome, and sweetly grac’d

“ With every ornament of taste.”

COTTON.

MR. SEYMOUR’S carriage was at the door early in the morning, and our travellers were soon ready to set out. Merton waited to assist them, and as he took the hand of Miriam, he said—“ I shall take this opportunity of going to London to visit my friend; . . . will

will you not sweeten his banishment by one kind word?"

Miriam sighed, and coloured.—“Tell him,” cried she, “that his conduct has ensured my esteem, and that my best wishes are his.”

“But shall I also say,” said Merton, “that this hand which I now hold, will soon be Mr. Mortimer’s?”

“Not for worlds!” cried Miriam, eagerly. “Oh Mr. Merton! how can you entertain such a thought? Dismiss it for ever, for on my honour there is no foundation for it.”

Merton’s eyes brightened as she spoke, and as he released her hand, he said—“I shall now meet my friend with a better face.” He then turned to take the hand of his beloved Henrietta; a tear dropped on it as he led her to the carriage, which he kissed
off

off with rapture. Henrietta had promised to receive his letters while at Menrooth; and having seated the object of his softest regards, he received the cordial farewell, and the friendly pressure of Mr. Seymour's hand, and then with a full heart he saw the carriage drive away. The chaise had proceeded a very few yards when Miriam discovered Mortimer standing at a little distance; his arms were folded, and he appeared intently musing; yet, as he caught a glance of her features, he eagerly lifted his hands—he seemed to implore the blessings of Heaven upon her, and while Miriam bent forward to shew him that he was not unnoticed, the tear hung on her eyelid, the commiserating sigh escaped her bosom. Mr. Seymour too had perceived Mortimer, and had made him a salutation.—“Poor young man,” said he,

“ I

“ I wish that——” but on seeing the agitation of Miriam, he proceeded no farther.

Autumn had spread its brown coat over the face of Nature : nothing opposed the progress of our travellers ; the weather was mild, serene, and pleasant, and towards the close of the third day they arrived in sight of Menrooth. Mr. Seymour was almost overcome by agitation when he reflected that a few minutes would most probably bring him into the presence of the sister of his beloved Caroline ; and when the carriage reached the lawn which led to the house, with a faltering voice he bade the postillion stop, and turning to Miriam, he said—“ I cannot break upon her unannounced : I now wish, my child, that a letter had preceded me. Will you, Miriam, will you go and warn Mrs. Lester of my approach ?”

Miriam

Miriam immediately jumped out of the chaise, and walked up the road; her heart beat high, and ere she reached the house, an universal trepidation seized her frame. She rang the door bell—a servant appeared; to her enquiry if Mrs. Lester was at home, she was answered in the affirmative. “Say that Miriam St. Ledger begs to be favoured with an interview.”

The servant soon returned, saying, “My Lady is unwell, and sees none but very particular friends, and she must decline your offered visit.”

“Oh no, no!” said the agitated Miriam; “tell her my business is of consequence: say I must see her.”

The servant seemed affected; he left her, and in a few minutes again appeared, and conducted her up a spacious staircase, and
through

through a long gallery to a small dressing-room, where on a couch sat Mrs. Lester; her whole appearance proclaimed that she still suffered under severe bodily ailment. She made a stiff inclination of her head as Miriam approached her, and said, in a low voice, "To what cause am I to impute this visit from Miss St. Ledger? Our very slight knowledge of each other did not authorize me to expect it."

Mortified at this chilling reception from Mrs. Lester—that Mrs. Lester whom Miriam could now have eagerly sprang forward to embrace, she remained for a moment silent. At length—"Ah, Madam!" cried she, "well do I know that on my own account this intrusion could not have been authorized; but if you could see the respect, the affection, the—— if you knew what I have
felt

felt at hearing, at seeing your indisposition——But what is this," added she, "to the present purpose?"

Miriam's feelings were overcome by this exertion, and she burst into tears.

Mrs. Lester appeared surprised and softened.—"You are a strange girl!" said she, putting her handkerchief to her eyes; "come, sit down," pointing to a chair next her, "and tell me how you came here. I should hardly forgive myself if I have accused you unjustly; yet your looks are so contradictory, your words are so unlike what I have heard of you, that I am tempted, even now tempted to doubt the evidence of my own senses.—Ah, Miriam! how came you under the protection of a single gentleman at Bath? Why did you leave Mr. Fitzpatrick's?"

Miriam's

Miriam's countenance brightened. "Now," said she, "I see, I know the cause of this coldness; but I can clear myself. My protector is the best, the most disinterested of men; he shielded me, he protected me from want, from penury; but he could not ward off the attacks of calumny—they fell on him as well as me; but conscience whispered that we deserved them not."

"I must, I will believe you," said Mrs. Lester, rising, and folding Miriam to her bosom; "there is a resistless energy in truth. I have been one of thy accusers; but tell me, persecuted girl, what is your business with me? I have power and will protect you."

"Oh!" cried Miriam, in an instant remembering the impatience, the agony in which Mr. Seymour must be waiting for

his summons, and losing her self-possession at this overpowering thought, "Oh Mrs. Lester! you had once a sister——" She could say no more; but, breathless and exhausted, she sunk in a pleading attitude at Mrs. Lester's feet.

"Good God!" cried that lady, with vehemence, "what of her? Speak, I charge you speak. I had indeed a tender, a much-loved sister; and even now, as I cast my eyes on you, even now I think I behold her; but—ah chimerical illusion!—she had a watery grave! Oh speak, lovely girl! do not torture me."

"Oh forgive me!" cried Miriam; "I should not thus have alarmed you;—that sister had a husband?"

"She had; he was the worthiest of men; he was I say, for years have elapsed since I have

we heard of him, and I believe he exists
longer!"

"He does, he does!" cried Miriam,
flinging her arms round
Mrs. Lester; "he lives to bless your
Miriam; he lives to protect the friendless;
he lives to embrace his much-loved sister!"

"Where, where?" said Mrs. Lester,
looking round the room.

"Here!" cried a voice; the door
opened, and Mrs. Lester was pressed to the
warm heart of a long-lost, a deeply-lamented
friend.

Unable to bear the absence of Miriam
any longer, Mr. Seymour and Henrietta
proceeded also to the house;—they were
met by a servant, who did not know Mrs.
Lester had company already with her; and
desiring to be shewn into a room, he

immediately preceded them to the dressing-room. To describe the scene which that dressing-room now afforded, is impossible : surprise, joy, regret alternately reigned in the bosoms of the united friends. When their emotions were in some degree allayed, Mr. Seymour gave the little history of many long and tedious years, and introduced his Henrietta to his sister's knowledge.

Miriam then took up her story ; she related her orphan state, the cruelty which had made her resolve on quitting the Castle, her fortunate *rencontre* with Mr. Seymour, and his more than paternal kindness.

“ Oh that I had a paternal interest in thee !” said Mr. Seymour, pressing her hand. “ But let me say,” continued he, turning to Mrs. Lester, “ that I was first interested for this face when I saw, or fancied I saw in it,
that

that expressive cast of countenance which had once belonged to my Caroline."

"Good Heavens! what a singular coincidence of ideas we possess!" said Mrs. Lester. "Do you know that the whole *contour* of her features and form so struck me at the Y—— Assembly, that I could not resist enquiring her name of Mr. Stafford. When I heard her called St. Ledger, my emotions were really unaccountable. So you see," continued Mrs. Lester, turning with an air of liveliness to Miriam, "you see that your face has been the attraction; but ah, my dear girl! how will you excuse me for believing you culpable—how will you forgive me for writing you an anonymous letter? It was the first time I ever concealed my name; but somehow I felt very repugnant when I thought of giving my advice *in propria persona*."

“ Had it been merited, how should I have been wounded,” cried Miriam, “ unless I had been callous indeed ! But now how grateful do I feel for your kind interest ! ”

“ What letter is this, Miriam ? ” said Mr. Seymour ; “ you did not inform me of your receiving any . ”

“ No, my dear Sir,” said Miriam ; “ if it had been calculated to give pleasure, how eager should I have been to inform you of its contents ; as it was—— ”

“ It could only have produced a contrary effect,” interrupted Mrs. Lester. “ Well, I see you are a noble girl, and you are, you must be a St. Ledger.”

Our happy party did not separate till late ; the ill health of Mrs. Lester, the fatigue of the travellers were alike forgotten, till the midnight clock recalled their recollection.

Mrs.

Mrs. Lester seemed to recover her health with her brother. Mr. Seymour's spirits continued placidly serene, and the two young friends walked arm in arm around the beautiful walks and grounds of Menrooth; but after three days' stay the impatience of Miriam was no longer to be restrained, and Mrs. Lester's coach was at the door to drive them to the Castle, that their young *protégée* might personally thank her two old friends for their faithful assistance. Miriam walked into the house alone; she did not like to frighten her rustics at first with the appearance of three strangers. Every passage, every spot called up some recollection in the bosom of our heroine; but she traversed with quick steps through the spacious old mansion, till she reached the steward's apartment, which had generally been the room of old Joanna.

There by the fire sat her aged friend; she was busily seated at her low wheel, spinning flax, with her spectacles on her nose, and singing, in rather a shrill tone, some long and doleful ditty; a few grey hairs had escaped from under her homely coif, and played around the deep furrows of her bronzed forehead. Miriam advanced.—

“Joanna! my good Joanna!”

“Oh lack-a-day! Oh merciful me!” said the astonished creature. “Come near! Oh Miss Merry! Miss Merry! is it you indeed? Well,” said she, dropping down on her knees, and lifting up her hands, “God be thanked for this! God be thanked that I have lived to see this day!”

Miriam ran to her, and flung her arms round her neck in silent delight. At that moment Joseph entered. He started back
in

in amazement. "Odds fadderkins!" said he, "why, if here bean't our own young Miss agen! Oh Miss! Miss! I be woundy glad to see you!"

"Thank you, my honest Joseph."

"But, Miss Merry," said Joanna, still holding her hand, and intently gazing on her face through her spectacles, "Oh my dear young Miss! how could you ever think of sending us poor volk twanty pounds? Why, my dear lovey, we can't use it, we never can; 'tis more than we shall want all our lives."

"Nonsense!" said Miriam; "you talk nonsense, Joanna; but my good friends came with me; they are at the gate now, and Mrs. Lester; they are coming in to see the Castle."

“ Oh lack-a-day ! Oh Lord blefs me ! ”
faid Joanna. “ Do, Jofeph, run and open
the great hall door, and the dining-room
windows, while I clap on my white apron.”

Miriam fmiled at hearing that Joanna
paid her ufual attention to her appearance ;
and while fhe clapped on her apron, Miriam
went to conduct her friends into the Caftle.
Every room was interefting to Mr. Seymour,
for almoft every room had been inhabited
by his favourite.

“ Well,” faid Henrietta, “ the more I
fee of this gloomy old place, the more do I
wonder at your refolution, Miriam ; it is
really enough to infpire the horrors.”

“ Ah Mifs ! ” faid Joanna, dropping in-
numerable curtfies, “ ’tis, to be fure, cruel
dull ; but what with her books, and her
miffick, and her drawings, and that there,
Mifs

Miss always seemed to make out her time."

"She was a wonderful girl, I think," said Henrietta.

"But, Miss Merry," said Joanna, "here is your drawing book: I was looking it over but t'other day, and then I see this pretty picture, and I know'd directly who you mean'd for the gentleman."

Miriam hastily seized the drawing, and put it in her pocket. Mr. Seymour observed her embarrassment; he turned on her a half reproachful, a half compassionate look, but no words passed.

Having finished their inspection, and Mr. Seymour having privately bestowed a mark of his favour on Joanna, which however he had great difficulty in making her accept, the party again got into their carriage, followed

by the low curtsies and humble bows of Joanna and her partner.

Miriam promised to visit them again ere she quitted Menrooth, and with this assurance they seemed reconciled to her present short stay.

CHAP. VIII.

“Thou art my daughter!”—

“Yes—and you’ve oft told me,

“With smiles of love, and chaste paternal kisses,

“I’d much resemblance of my mother.”

OTWAY.

A FORTNIGHT glided imperceptibly away at Menrooth. Mrs. Lester’s health continued to mend, and she had promised to accompany her visitors to Bath at the end of the succeeding one, as Mr. Seymour feared experiencing another attack of his

5 disorder,

disorder, unless he prevented it by having early recourse to the waters.

Henrietta had received several letters from Merton;—they made her perfectly easy ; but they had not that effect on Miriam.—“ I don't know what this Mr. Merton thinks of himself,” said Henrietta to her one morning ; “ but he keeps up a strange sort of reserve on the subject of his friend ; and yet, by what I can put together, I fancy he is deserving, though I fear unhappy.”

Miriam's feat grew uneasy ; she blamed herself for having any reserves with Henrietta, yet she felt it at present impossible to be communicative, and deeply brooding on the unhappiness of Stafford, she continued silent.

Mr. Seymour, seeing her in the window, beckoned her to join him on the terrace, and she immediately complied.—“ Come, my dear,”

dear," said he, "take my arm, and hear me. I have been reflecting on the prospect of happiness which opens to my Henrietta. Merton's manners are interesting, his character is amiable, his fortune is ample; the affection of the young people appears mutual, and yet let me confess to you, Miriam, that there is one circumstance I wish to have cleared up ere he marries my girl."

"What is that, Sir?" said Miriam, in a hurried tone.

"The world, my dear girl, would laugh at me; to people, who entertain modern notions, what I allude to, would recommend Merton to their favour. Far different are my sentiments: I abhor cowardice; but the duellist is to me a dreadful character. Start not, my Miriam; I was informed, before I left Clifton, that the illness of Merton proceeded

ceeded from the effects of a wound which had been occasioned by his fighting a duel, on some very slight provocation, with an intimate friend."

Miriam shook with emotion.

"How could I yield up the peace, the life of my Henrietta, to the care of a man who would risk his life on every trifling dispute? How——"

"Oh my dear Sir!" cried Miriam, "read here his justification, read here the worth of his heart!"

Mr. Seymour looked astonished, while Miriam put Henry Stafford's narrative into his hand.—"Ah there," continued Miriam, "will you see the generosity which has kept him silent on the subject—there will you see the cause of my anxiety—there will you discover the cause of my (ofttimes) despondency. Oh
forgive

forgive your Miriam for withholding her confidence till now ! At first I was unwilling to hurt you with the stories so maliciously propagated of your kindness to me. While you attended Henrietta to the coach at Bristol Theatre, Stafford approached me ; he looked, he spoke like a maniac ; he had heard the malevolence of scandal ; he believed it, for a time he believed it, and his heart was agonized :—this will explain some expressions in his letter—this will shew you why he left—— Oh, Sir ! I can stay no longer !” and she ran swift as an arrow into the house.

Mr. Seymour was all consternation ; yet he retired to an alcove on the terrace, and left it not till he had perused the packet which Miriam had left in his hands. His delight at finding Merton so nobly cleared,
with

with regard to the duel, was overpowered by the admiration he felt for Stafford. Pity swelled in his bosom as he reflected on the improbability of his Miriam ever being united to the object of her affections; for Mr. Seymour resolved, that never with his consent should she enter a family unnoticed by its heads. It was a great while ere he could attain resolution to return to Miriam; when he did, he put the packet impressively into her hands, saying, "Miriam, Stafford is indeed worthy of you, and you are both highly deserving the notice of his uncle. Ah! how vain are the distinctions of birth when opposed to virtue like your's! But you know my sentiments on this subject; you also know my opinion (alas, how dearly acquired!) of clandestine proceedings. Noble Stafford! what a combat was his between principle

principle and inclination, duty and affection! He has acted nobly.—My dear, I will not pain you by dwelling on this subject any longer: only hear my determination; I am now fixed on what I have for some time meditated. I will myself accompany you to London; I will myself usher you into the vile Fitzpatrick's presence; and I will insist on his informing you of every circumstance, the minutest circumstance, he knows respecting your parents. Why, if they were domestics dependant on him, why should he change your name? What cause was there for concealment? Do not be too sanguine, Miriam; but much I suspect we shall discover that he has deeply wronged you;" then kissing her wet cheek, he left her.

To

To Henrietta and Mrs. Lester did Mr. Seymour now relate his conference with Miriam; for she had desired that they also might be no longer strangers to her feelings. Henrietta was enraptured at Stafford's eulogy on his friend; yet the tears rolled down her cheeks as she reflected on the disappointment of Miriam. She lost no time in writing to Merton, and telling him when they returned to Clifton; for Mr. Seymour proposed staying there a week ere he proceeded to Bath. Henrietta also asked him about his friend, and mentioned the interest which Stafford had excited in her.

Early one morning Miriam was awakened by a tap at her door. She enquired who was there, and was answered in a well-known key—" 'Tis me, Miss; 'tis your old Joanna."

"Come

"Come in," said Miriam, wondering what could cause the appearance of Joanna at Menrooth.

"Ah, Miss!" said Joanna, "I should not have made so bold as to intrude, but I have such news for ye! Law, Miss, master's at the Castle!"

"Who?" cried Miriam, in consternation.

"Mr. Fitzpatrick, Miss; but, Lord! don'tee look so pale; you needn't be afeard of he, for he's in a bad taking hisself."

"What is the matter?" said Miriam; "come sit down, and relate your story."

"Oh Miss!" said Joanna, doing as she was bid, and wiping her forehead, "this comes of old gentlemen or elderly gentlemen marrying young beauties; never no good can come, I'm very sartin; but howsom-dever

dever I'll tell you.—Last night, 'twas near ten o'clock, and Joseph was just a stirring out the fire, and I was unpinning my cap, when helter-skelter we heard such a noise!

“Lord, Joseph!” says I, “is that thunder?”

“No, I'fackins!” says Joseph; “but 'tis a carriage coming down the paved road.”

Lack-a-day, what a pother I was in! The bell ring'd at the door, and I ran to it, and held the candle while Joseph unlocked it.”

“Who's here?” says Joseph.

“Friends,” was the answer.

“Lack-a-daisy,” says I, “why sure that's master's footman?”

“Yes, 'tis indeed!” says Robert; “open the door directly, for my master's outside.”

“Blessed Lord, how I did shake!”

“Now,” said Robert, “is Mrs. Fitzpatrick here?”

“Here!”

“ Here !” says I ; “ Lord helpee, Robert be dreaming ?”

“ Has she been here ?”

“ No, I fegs !” says Joseph ; “ this be no place for a gay body like she.”

“ I told my master so,” said Robert, “ but he wouldn’t hearken to me.”—Well, Miss, the short and the long is, that Mrs. Fitzpatrick has ’loped, and carried off a deal of money with her. Robert says all the servants know as ’tis with a young East Indian, as she has kept company with a great while ; but master wouldn’t hearken to him that she was gone sure enough, but thought ’twas all of a frolic, till he com’d down to the Castle, and found ’twas true. Poor gentleman, I do pity en, for he looks cruel bad, and ’tis hard to be so tricked :—however, he’s paid now for all his wickedness to you, Miss ; and
all

all the sarvants, they does but laugh about it, and say their master is well sarved for his pains, in vent'ring on such a mad-cap, hoity-toity thing."

Miriam had hitherto remained silent. She now thanked Joanna for her intelligence; but Joanna heard the house clock strike eight, and it frightened her so, that she declared she must be gone directly, for that there was nobody of a woman about the house but herself.—“But I couldn't help coming, Miss; and so Joseph saddled me the old black mare, and I trotted away mainly. Good by, dear Miss Merry; I must be gone!”

Miriam pondered over the information she had received till the breakfast-bell summoned her, and she then eagerly communicated her intelligence.

Mrs.

Mrs. Lester said it was no more than she had suspected ; and “ I declare,” said she, “ I do not pity the Nabob ; if he feels now, it is only for the loss of the money she has taken with her, and he well deserves his punishment.”

“ Now,” said Mr. Seymour, “ is the time, Miriam, for you to appear before him, —now when he feels friendless and deserted himself,—perhaps will compunction strike his heart.”

“ Ah !” said Miriam, “ is this a time to wound him with my appearance ?”

“ Yes, my dear ; I see the generous feelings which actuate you ; but now is, now shall be the time.”

“ It shall indeed,” said Mrs. Lester, “ and I will accompany you. Henrietta, you shall go too ; so pull the bell, and we

will order the coach, and catch the lion in his den."

Miriam was the least active of the party. She could not account for the emotions which filled her mind, but fear seemed to predominate as she once more entered a house which contained Mr. Fitzpatrick. Mr. Seymour enquired in what room Mr. Fitzpatrick was sitting, and, without waiting to be announced, the party entered the study. Upon an easy chair, by the fire, sat Mr. Fitzpatrick: no longer the wily, the self-important Nabob; his meagre form was wrapped up in a dressing gown; his orange visage looked yet more ghastly, by being surrounded with his unpowdered and matted grey locks; his under jaw seemed to fall as the door opened; but when his eyes fixed on the countenance of Miriam, he said—"So, what,

what, Merry, are you come again to trouble me? I've trouble enough already; I don't want more: I've washed my hands of you."

Miriam shook at the well-remembered tones; but a nod from Mrs. Lester, and a look from Mr. Seymour re-assured her. Mr. Seymour, making a slight inclination of his head to Fitzpatrick, seated Mrs. Lester and Henrietta, and taking Miriam's hand, put her in a seat next himself. Fitzpatrick looked around him, with eyes that seemed to say, "What is the meaning of all this?"

Mr. Seymour at length said—"You are not to apprehend, Sir, that Miss St. Ledger is come to solicit your pity; her merit, her sufferings have raised her powerful friends: she comes not to solicit a favour, but to demand a right."

The grey eyes of Fitzpatrick fell under the piercing gaze of Mr. Seymour. He hesitatingly said—"What can she want of me? I have nothing to do with her; I will have nothing to do with her: I've said before, I've washed my hands of her long ago."

"She comes," said Seymour, rising from his chair, and approaching Fitzpatrick in a steady, solemn manner, "she comes to demand from you—you who have hitherto appeared the only individual who knew to whom she belonged—you who called yourself her guardian—she demands from you the name, the history of her parents—she requires from your lips the truth;—how came she consigned to your trust alone, and what reason had you for changing her real name, if indeed that of St. Ledger be an assumed one?"

Fitzpatrick's lips quivered; his whole frame shook.—“ And pray,” said he, scowling at Mr. Seymour, with venomous malice, “ what right have you to ask these questions?”

“ I have that right which belongs to every son of man who has feelings for the unfortunate, who dares to be the champion of the innocent—the protector, the avenger, if required,” laying an emphasis on the word, “ of the orphan.”

Fitzpatrick was silent: Mr. Seymour paused, as if awaiting his answer. At length he added—“ Come, pray, Sir, answer me; what is the real name of this young lady?”

“ I should like to know the name of the man who dares ask me such impertinent questions,” returned Fitzpatrick, nodding mischievously.

“ You shall easily be informed of that, Sir,” said Seymour, advancing intrepidly towards him. “ My name has never been stained by an unworthy action ; my person has never been insulted with impunity. This arm, which oft has borne a sword in the service of my country, is yet strong enough to chastise impertinence. Edward Seymour,” said he, raising his voice, “ now stands before you ; it is he who asks you, Mr. Fitzpatrick, who was the father of this young lady.”

“ Yourself ! Oh righteous God ! you are her father !” cried Fitzpatrick, and with a hollow groan, he sunk back in his chair.

Miriam sprang from her seat ; she endeavoured to clasp the knees of her father, but her head fell on his shielding bosom, while Mrs. Lester, screaming with affright, and

and almost frantic with emotion, called on the thunderstruck Fitzpatrick, saying—"Oh in pity tell me who, who was her mother?"

"Ah speak!" cried Mr. Seymour, resigning the lifeless Miriam to the care of Henrietta; "tell me where did you know my angel? Alas! alas! I fear, poor girl, thou yet art fatherless!"

Fitzpatrick's terror, his surprise, had almost bereft him of the power of utterance, which was never very clear with him. Miriam was, by the assistance of Joanna, conveyed to a bed; Henrietta, the affectionate Henrietta, watched over her for two hours, which time Mr. Seymour and Mrs. Lester spent with the guilty—the horror-stricken Fitzpatrick.

When Miriam recovered, she was pressed to the bosom of a fond father; she was clasped in the arms of a transported aunt."

“ Oh,” cried Miriam, “ how new, how delightful are the sensations which fill my soul ! How shall I ever bless this Castle, that study, once the scene of painful humiliation, now the spot which opens to me the supremest felicity.—My father ! my aunt !” said she, looking at them by turns : “ Oh my senses ache with the mighty joy !”

“ Compose yourself, dear Miriam ! sweet daughter of my own Caroline !” said Mr. Seymour, kissing her cheek, and wetting it with tears ; “ compose yourself—in this bosom you shall ever find rest, this arm shall protect you.”

“ And this heart,” cried Mrs. Lester, snatching her hand with emotion, and pressing it to her side, “ this throbbing heart shall ever love you. Are there not feelings of consanguinity ?

confanguinity? Gain say it who will, I am for ever a sceptic. What drew my heart to the dear daughter of my sister—what but the strong ties of blood?”

Miriam now relieved her full heart by a violent shower of tears. Mrs. Lester participated with her. Henrietta's eyes overflowed also, and Mr. Seymour retired to a window. Impatient as Miriam was to hear the history which Fitzpatrick had given, yet was she obliged to restrain her impatience, for both her doting relatives feared at present to agitate her spirits any further.

It was evening ere they again reached Menrooth. The guilty Fitzpatrick, after having made a full confession, and given his word in writing to make restitution to the deeply-injured Mr. Seymour, shut himself up in his chamber, unable to look at the

generous girl on whom he had been heaping continual wrongs for eighteen years !

“ I have at last found a deserving, a lovely child,” cried Mr. Seymour ; “ she is my pride, my honour : in the blessing which is given to my arms, I must forget every uncharitable sensation.”

And now where do we leave our heroine—our heretofore orphan Miriam ? We leave her in the mansion of Men-rooth, received into it as the darling niece of Mrs. Lester ; we leave her in the sheltering protection of a fond father, cherished, carested, soothed, almost adored by every one around her ! Such a transition seemed too mighty to be real ; yet in the midst of the wild tumult of her heart, our pious Miriam caught a moment of retirement, to bend her grateful knees, in adoration and thankfulness, to that Being who had
thus

thus heaped his blessings on her. Her tongue could not utter; but the grateful workings of her mind were known to Him, before whose searching eye nothing is hid.

I will now give my readers the substance of that confession which the unexpected sight of Mr. Seymour frightened from Fitzpatrick; but for that I must refer them to the following chapter.

CHAP. IX.

“ To you, Sir, and your honour, I bequeath her,

“ And with her this ——”

OTWAY.

MRS. SEYMOUR (it has been mentioned before) waited impatiently at Gravesend for the sailing of the —— . Most of her baggage was already on board, and the ship was under sailing orders, when a sudden and violent illness attacked poor Caroline, and instead of being put on board the ship, she was conveyed to her bed. Her
woman,

woman, a woman hired at once to be her *accoucheur*, nurse, and attendant, watched over her with unremitting care. She procured for her the best medical attendance, and was almost distracted when her Lady's malady was pronounced to be the measles, and she heard that the —— had failed. During a week the life of Mrs. Seymour was despaired of; when her disorder attained the height, the pangs of childbirth seized her, and she was prematurely delivered of a little girl. The mother recovered very slowly. Mary was transported with joy when she found there was still a chance of her existence, and attempted to prevail on Mrs. Seymour to give up all thoughts of going to India, and to attempt a reconciliation with her family.

“No,”

“ No,” cried Caroline, “ I am fixed ; the first ship that sails shall bear me and my little one to my Edward. Alas ! what will be his consternation when he sees the ——— arrive without his Caroline ! But I will lose no time : I will quickly follow ; ere he can receive a letter, he shall behold his wife !”

Mrs. Seymour was resolved, and combating with weakness and pain, she sailed from Gravesend only six weeks after the ———. The long passage to India did not restore the health of Caroline, or strengthen her spirits ; and when at length she landed, she was obliged to have a bed prepared, from which she could not move for several days. Impatience to behold her husband once more stimulated her exertions. The English Army were more than a hundred miles

miles from the place where she landed; she knew that Mr. Seymour could not absent himself; and the fate of the ——— East Indiaman, which she had heard on her landing, and the idea of her Seymour's despair at believing her no more, made her resolve on pursuing her way to him. The weather was very sultry; and at the end of the second day, when Mrs. Seymour reached a small town, she flung herself, fainting, on the shoulder of Mary, and cried—"Oh here it ends! I fear I shall never, never proceed farther!"

Mary was almost bereft of her senses, yet she once more put her mistress into bed, and on feeling her pulse, her burning hands, she found, with increased alarm, that a high fever already raged in her veins. In what a situation was this faithful servant! In a
strange

strange country with no adviser near her—in a place where no medical assistance could be procured—a beloved mistress dying, and a sweet babe crying in vain for that nutriment which the considerate Mary knew it would be death to give it! Poor Mrs. Seymour was calm and collected, yet perfectly sensible of her situation. She was convinced that her recovery was totally impossible; and this conviction was happiness compared to what she felt when Mary rushed into the chamber, and said—“Alas! my dear Lady, your Mary, your poor Mary is sickening of the same fever, and what will become of your tender babe?”

Mrs. Seymour at first seemed expiring; but at length she collected strength enough to send for the landlord of the inn. On his appearance she besought him to seek out

an

an Englishman of respectability and credit, to whom she might consign her child, and relate her story, for that she feared she had not long to live.

The landlord, alarmed at the idea of her dying in his house, and imagining that she had little or no money with her, feared that he might be involved in some expence or trouble; and with fearful haste he sent a mile off into the country for Mr. Fitzpatrick, whom he considered as the richest man in the neighbourhood, and whom he thought the most proper person to undertake such a charge.

Mr. Fitzpatrick was astonished at the unusual and late summons; but his surprise was converted into displeasure when mine host related his story.

“ Phaw ! ”

"Pshaw!" interrupted Fitzpatrick, "how can I stir in this affair? I am overwhelmed in business already. How could you think of sending for me?"

Mine host was lost in affright and confusion; he would not have disoblged Mr. Fitzpatrick for worlds; but the poor lady seemed in such affliction, and she was a stranger, and her servant had just taken to her bed too, **and then** she seemed to be of quality.

"Quality, hey!" said Fitzpatrick. "Come, come, I'll just go up and see her; shew me the way."

"Ah blessings on your good Honour," said the innkeeper, as he followed him upstairs.

Mrs. Seymour tried to lift her head from the pillow as Mr. Fitzpatrick entered. She waved her hand for his conductor to withdraw,

draw, and she then unbosomed her full soul to Mr. Fitzpatrick. The effect her story had on him was wonderful; he eagerly promised that he would perform whatever she required, and he called his honour to witness his integrity. (Alas! he had never possessed a grain of either.) Mrs. Seymour desired her child might be brought to her, and pressing the infant to her agitated, her burning bosom in agony, she gave it into the hands of Mr. Fitzpatrick, and taking a little trunk, she said—"Here is the sum of money which I have already mentioned; take charge, generous stranger, of all my earthly treasure, of all that I possess, for, alas! my Edward is separated from me, and I shall never see him more! Oh bear to him, worthy Mr. Fitzpatrick, bear to him my child and her little fortune; tell all the sad, sad story of my death;

death; say how my longing eyes have ached, say how my throbbing heart still pants to clasp its much-loved Lord. But it must not be; Death approaches with hasty strides, and even now I dread to let my child remain near her mother's contaminating breath. My Mary, my faithful servant, is already seized with the fatal distemper! Alas! I cannot say half what I wish: I have already explained every thing requisite, but in that trunk you will find minute particulars of my Seymour's station. Oh bear to him his child, as you would merit the happiness of the just; tell him to call my girl St. Ledger, for that name is still dear to her mother. Oh Sir, I can no more! but accept all that a fond, a grateful mother's heart can offer for your benignant charity."

Mrs.

Mrs. Seymour then sunk back exhausted on the bed. Fitzpatrick piously lifted up his hands and eyes, and invoked the wrath of Heaven on his head, if he did not scrupulously perform her injunctions. A peaceful serenity seemed to overspread the already beatified countenance of Mrs. Seymour ; and ere the night was over, her gentle spirit had fled for ever from its earthly tenement !

Fitzpatrick then left the house, taking with him the child, and not forgetting the little trunk, which he told the landlord contained only wearing apparel for the babe ; but as he found by the poor lady's account, that her infant was a real object of charity, he had consented to take the care of her, and had also resolved to bury the mother at his own expence.—“ For I never expect

pect to be paid in this world," cried Fitzpatrick, "her poor husband is dead too; and this little thing is a real orphan. I had an account, from a private correspondent, of the action which took place last week, and this poor gentleman's name is particularly mentioned; but I had not the heart to disturb the lady's last moments with the sad news, and she died in ignorance of it."

The unsuspecting host believed every syllable of Mr. Fitzpatrick's narration; and he silently blessed his stars that he had got so good a riddance of such a troublesome business.—When poor Mary heard her mistress was really no more, her grief was so poignant, and her agitation so strong, that the fever flew to her brain; and after laying in a miserable state for two days, she expired!—Fitzpatrick ordered every thing necessary on
the

the occasion; and his charity, his benevolence, was the general theme of conversation in the village and its vicinity:—but unable to bear the continual sound of his own praises, he soon left the neighbourhood, and took up his residence nearer Madras. There he hired new servants. Miriam was a stranger to them; her history was known only to the Nabob, and she passed for the daughter of a favourite domestic, who had died in childbirth. It was therefore whispered that Miriam had a tender claim on the affections of her protector; and this whisper (as the truth was known only to himself) he did not attempt to contradict.

When Fitzpatrick brought his charge over to England, it was necessary to give her some name besides that of Miriam; and in the first moments of confusion, he answered
to

to his sister's enquiry, "St. Ledger;"—we have seen of what distress, what trepidation, that name was productive.

The wicked man cannot always stifle the reproaches of conscience; and the fear of discovery was a continual sore in the breast of Fitzpatrick.—When he heard "Edward Seymour" audibly uttered in his ear by the man who bore the name, the heart of Fitzpatrick sunk within him;—he imagined his guilt was already discovered when he saw Miriam supported by her father; and he was terrified into a full confession of his crimes. Mr. Seymour now found himself unexpectedly in the possession of a lovely daughter, and a sum of money by no means inconsiderable, as it had been accumulating from year to year; a very small sum having been expended on his child.

Mr.

Mr. Seymour's fortune was easy ; he did not want money, but there were always deserving objects on which to bestow it : and he resolved that Fitzpatrick should make ample restitution, and be taught that even in this world villany is not suffered to prosper long.

The Nabob's purse had been enormously weighty ; this his Lady knew, and she had wisely lightened it of ten thousand pounds before she took her Continental trip with her young Creolian favourite. By the time Mr. Seymour had received his due, this overgrown leviathan would become more portable to its possessor.

Never was a scene of greater happiness than that exhibited at Menrooth : yet as Henrietta was impatient to inform Merton

of their recent discovery, and as Miriam was equally impatient for him to acquaint his friend, and as they were all going one way, their departure was not retarded.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

“ In me thou dost behold

“ The poor remains of beauty once admir'd :

“ The autumn of my days is come already,

“ For sorrow made my summer haste away.”

HOME.

AND now once more we behold our heroine at Clifton. Henrietta's face was overspread by disappointment, which she could not conceal, when she did not find Merton waiting to welcome her. Miriam partici-

M 2

pated

pated in her feelings.—“ Ah !” thought she, “ and till he comes, Stafford will remain ignorant of my having found a father !”

“ But he will come to-morrow !” sighed Henrietta ; and full of that hope, she sought her pillow.

In the morning, Miriam accompanied Mrs. Lester and Mr. Seymour in a stroll to the Hot Wells Pump Room. They had rested themselves a few minutes, and were returning, when a lady entered, whose slow step and pallid appearance attracted their attention : she leant on a female servant ; a tall gentleman walked by her side.

“ Oh my God !” said Miriam, “ it is Mr. and Mrs. Stafford !”

“ It is indeed Mrs. Stafford !” said Mrs. Lester. “ Oh Miriam ! see there the wreck of beauty ! But let us go and speak to them ;—come, call up your courage, love ;
forget

forget all former scenes. I must introduce you as my niece, as the daughter of Mr. Seymour, to Mr. Stafford !”

“ Ah !” cried Miriam, “ I lose every remembrance in the contemplation of that ashy face—sure ’tis the hue of death !”

Mrs. Lester shook her head ; and beckoning Mr. Seymour, told him her intention. She advanced to Mr. Stafford, who was in the outside room (his Lady having gone in to take the waters), and having paid her compliments, bade him congratulate her on having recently discovered a niece in Mr. Fitzpatrick’s ward ; and presented Mr. Seymour and his daughter by name.

Mr. Stafford congratulated her with civility and politeness ; but there was a deep look of care on his brow, which did not escape the observation of Miriam. He had

been always pleased with our heroine ; he now spoke to her with great cordiality.

“ I grieve to see Mrs. Stafford look so ill, Sir,” said Miriam.

“ She is ill indeed,” answered he in a grave tone. “ I fear her decay is certain.”

“ Shall I alarm her by speaking ?” said Miriam. “ I fear to intrude on her without preparation.”

“ I will speak to her first,” said Mr. Stafford ; and he presently led out the feeble, the fragile, but the still interesting Emily.

Mrs. Stafford faintly pressed the hand of Miriam ; her heart was too full for speech ; but she leant on her arm, while the rest of the party walked on before.

Miriam was acutely pained at witnessing her situation ; yet endeavouring to compose her emotions, she, in a low and gentle tone,

com-

communicated the happy discovery which had been lately made by Mr. Seymour.

“ You deserve it all,” said Mrs. Stafford.
“ Forgive me, Miriam ! for I ——” She could say no more ; the words died on her tongue.

Miriam was at a loss what to say ; but she raised the hand of Mrs. Stafford to her lips, and the tear which rolled down over the cheek of the fair shadow, shewed that she understood her.

Mrs. Stafford lodged on St. Vincent’s Parade ; and they soon arrived at her door.—“ Will you not come in ?” said she to Miriam. “ I have much to say to you ; and, alas ! perhaps a short time will for ever close my lips !”

Miriam excused herself at that time.

“ Then,” returned Mrs. Stafford, yet lower than before, “ when will you come ?”

say this evening; perhaps another will see me a breathless corpse!"

"Oh say not so!" cried Miriam, with emotion.

"Ah! my gentle girl, it is nearly over with this poor feverish being. Say you will come to-night!"

"I will," said Miriam, "if it will afford you comfort."

"Ah the greatest! almost the greatest I can know!" said she hastily, catching her words.

Miriam could not answer, but hastily curtsied her adieu, and joined her party, who were still on the walk.—Mr. Stafford then took his leave, and they proceeded homewards.

Mr. Stafford had informed Mrs. Lester, during Miriam's absence, that a cough had for some time tormented Mrs. Stafford, and that

that about a fortnight had passed since she had been seized with a violent vomiting of blood, occasioned by the bursting of a blood-vessel. This had brought her to the lowest ebb of weakness; yet, as a last resource, her physicians had ordered her to the Hot Wells; but they did not give any hope, and even apprehended a return of the vomiting.

The high, the haughty soul of Mr. Stafford was nearly overcome by affliction. He saw his youthful wife, the only woman he had ever loved, bending hourly to the grave. His nephew he had himself expelled from his sight, and his niece had disgraced her family and her sex. His own importance, his birth, his rank, his name, seemed now the distinctions of idea only; for they were all insufficient to purchase for him one moment's happiness!

When our *trio* returned, Henrietta's eyes were red.

"What is the matter with my girl?" said Mr. Seymour.

"She is a little simpleton," answered Henrietta, striving to smile through her tears, and putting a letter into his hand. "This letter, Sir, so unlike Merton, so short, so unsatisfactory!"

Mr. Seymour read it, and continued in a musing attitude.

"Now tell me," cried the artless girl, looking up in his face with an enquiring eye, "is there not something concealed? Is it like Merton? I am sure there is a suppression; his style is forced, and he does not tell me the occasion of his absence."

"Have patience, my love; I do not blame your anxiety—it assures me of your affection; but my life on Merton's honour!"

"And

“ And mine too,” said Henrietta, warmly.
“ Oh ! it is his safety, his life, his health that I fear for.”

“ Let me see the letter,” said Miriam.
She read the following words.

“ My dearest Henrietta will believe how I lament the cause which keeps me still in London ; but there is a cause, and I grieve that I cannot say at what period she may expect me.—I write this in hurry and confusion, as you may easily discover. I do not ask you to answer it, for ere a letter can reach me, I may be on the wing to my dearest girl:—but, alas ! of this I am not certain, therefore expect me not till you see me. Rely on my honour, my truth ; and believe me, nothing but absolute necessity should detain me from you at this period.

“ Make my regards to your dear friends ;
and still believe me, sweet Henrietta,

“ Your faithful

“ C. MERTON.”

Miriam was at a loss to account for the absence of Merton ; and while she sympathized with Henrietta, she also trembled for the safety of Stafford.—“ Ah,” thought she, “ should his impetuous disposition have again entangled his friend, how will his generous heart suffer !”

Henrietta, however, had promised Mr. Seymour to wait with patience for the development of this puzzling letter ; and she tried to keep her word.

“ Where are you going, Miriam ?” said Mr. Seymour, on seeing her prepare for a walk after she had dined.

"I am going," answered she, "to visit poor Mrs. Stafford."

"Poor Mrs. Stafford indeed!" said Mrs. Lester. "She seems a sorrowing penitent."

"You are right to go," rejoined Mr. Seymour, "if she desired it. She has suffered severely for the weakness of her heart—depravity would be for her too harsh a term."

Our heroine found Mrs. Stafford sitting in an easy chair, attended only by her woman. She held out her hand, and Miriam being seated next her, she motioned her attendant to withdraw.—"Ah! Miriam, will you once more listen to my wailings? Mr. Stafford is engaged writing letters of consequence, therefore we shall have no interruption."

Miriam eagerly said that she was very happy in being once more near her.

"You

“ You are a good girl—you always were. I am not what I was, Miss Seymour ; I have watched, I have reflected, and I hope I have repented,” added she, in a hollow tone. “ Feeble by nature, I rendered myself yet more so by habit ; I gave loose to the weakness of my heart on every occasion, and I was blindly led wherever a *false friend* guided the way.—You have heard *her* shameful conduct :—alas ! might not mine have been worse, had I not met with the *very form* of virtue in Henry Stafford ?—Miss Seymour, it is now too late to attempt disguising what you must long since have known, that he was the entire possessor of my weak heart ! In a moment of intoxicated vanity, I consented to listen to Louisa Stafford, and —— You know the rest.—I married her uncle—but ah ! I see you already know the story, do you not ?—Yes, yes, I see you do.—

Ah

Ah Miriam ! Stafford loves you—you are the dearest tie of his existence !—Blush not ! who merits him if you do not ?—One thing, and I should die in peace !—Oh, if Mr. Stafford would but consent to see, to ——”

Miriam waited impatiently to hear the dying wish of her friend ; but at that moment the door opened, and Mr. Stafford entered : he approached Miriam with an air of kindness, and told her she was good to visit his Emily. He conversed a little while, and Miriam perceiving he had finished his writing, soon took her leave.

CHAP. XI.

“ Canst thou forgive me all my follies past,
“ I’ll henceforth be indeed a father ;—never,
“ Never more thus expose, but cherish thee,
“ Dear as the vital warmth that feeds my life.”

OTWAY.

THE following morning Miriam again walked to St. Vincent’s Parade, impatient to hear what it was Mrs. Stafford was so eager to say when they had been interrupted the preceding evening.—The door of the parlour was

was open : Mr. Stafford was walking to and fro with hasty steps, holding an open letter in his hand. Miriam was about to withdraw, when Mr. Stafford hastily approached her.—“ Miss Seymour,” said he, in a hurried tone, “ will you assist me with your advice?—I am at this moment in the greatest distress.—You know my nephew—you know Henry Stafford?”—Miriam’s countenance turned to an ashy hue.—“ An express has this instant reached me that he lies dangerously ill :—he prays me to come to him ; he beseeches me to afford him my blessing, my forgiveness, ere he is no more !”

“ Your forgiveness !” shrieked out the distracted Miriam, “ your forgiveness !—Oh poor, poor Stafford !” and she fell to the ground.

Mr. Stafford was frightened at the effect of his words—he rung for assistance ; and after
some

some time, he restored the afflicted girl to her senses.

“ Oh ! for God sake, haste away, dear, dear Sir ! ” cried she, sinking at his feet.—

“ Lose no time in going to your nephew.— My God ! how can he have offended you ? Tell me, in pity tell me ! ”

“ Rise, Miss Seymour, pray rise,” said Mr. Stafford. “ I am amazed at your emotion ; I hope my nephew is deserving of the kind interest you feel for him.”

“ Oh he deserves every thing ! ” cried the agonized Miriam, unconscious of her warmth : “ he is the best, the noblest of human beings ! ”

“ He was once the dearest object in his uncle’s heart.

“ And why is he not now ? — Oh Sir, tell me—but alas ! even now perhaps he is dying !

dying!—for the love of Heaven, haste and save *my* Stafford!”

Mr. Stafford looked surprised.—“ And is my nephew fortunate enough to possess *your* affections?—Ah, unhappy youth! had you known this, it might have guarded your heart from a guilty, a disgraceful prepossession, and you might have still been worthy of my notice.”

“ Oh believe me, he is most worthy!” said Miriam. “ I could tell you how worthy—I could tell you what noble self-denial, what honour, what principle are his:—but alas! he dies, he expires far—far from his uncle—far from her for whose sake he would venture his life.”

“ You bewilder me, Madam,” said Mr. Stafford. “ Does my nephew love you?”

“ If there be truth in man, he does!” answered Miriam vehemently. “ Oh hasten

to

to him! save him from death by your timely presence! Oh Mr. Stafford, refuse not his entreaty!"

"I am half tempted to follow your advice—I am also half tempted," added Mr. Stafford, "to believe that I have deeply wronged him:—but then," musing, "the picture, how can I account for that—the picture found in her possession?—'Tis true Emily said he was innocent, that he ——"

"Oh he was innocent, guileless as the dove!" said Miriam, clasping her hands. "You have discovered Mrs. Stafford's unfortunate predilection—you know the depravity of your niece; concealment now would be unavailing. Read this, Sir," cried she, taking out the packet of Stafford from her pocket, which she had been that morning studying—"read, and fly to your injured, your noble nephew:—save his life, or ——"

Miriam

Miriam gasped for breath. "But for God's sake, be speedy! let me order your carriage the while ——"

Miriam then left the room to give orders; yet scarcely did she know what she said, so violently was her mind agitated. She sat down in an adjoining room; yet she had not patience to wait till Mr. Stafford had finished. She rushed in, saying—"Oh Sir! let me conjure you to be speedy!"

"Yes!" cried Mr. Stafford, rising and taking her hand, "yes, lovely young lady, I will be speedy.—Oh grant, Almighty God! that such a nephew may yet be spared to his doting uncle—grant that he may yet receive in this world the reward of virtue—in thee, my niece!"

Miriam, without knowing what she did, joined in the ejaculation.

Mr.

Mr. Stafford was going out of the room ; he paused, and put his hand to his forehead.—

“ Ah, Miss Seymour ! my dying, my repentant Emily ! how can I leave her ? ”

“ Oh I will watch by, I will sooth, I will attend her ! ” said the eager Miriam.—“ Oh Mr. Stafford, pray—I entreat you go ! ”

“ I will,” said Mr. Stafford ; “ and yet I feel a deep struggle here :—poor Emily ! I cannot see her ; but do you speak peace, Miss Seymour, to her troubled spirit.”

Mr. Stafford then hastily prepared for his departure. The carriage was already at the door ; and the firm pressure of Miriam’s hand as he quitted her, told him that her happiness depended on the success of his journey. Miriam was about to seek the chamber of Mrs. Stafford, when she found the letter which had announced to Mr. Stafford his nephew’s illness.

“ SIR,

“ SIR,

“ When you see the signature of “ Merton,” you will probably remember it as the name of your nephew’s friend. I am now with your nephew ; the distress of mind which he has long laboured under, has at length affected his whole frame :—for the last fortnight he has kept his bed ; he is certainly in a very precarious state, and he has this moment conjured me to write to you, his valued uncle : without your forgiveness, your blessing, he says he cannot die in peace.— Oh hasten to bestow the cordial balm, for he sadly wants it :—his feeling, his noble heart cannot bear neglect. Excuse a bewildered head, and believe me, Sir, with respect,

“ Your obedient

“ C. MERTON.”

Mr.

Mr. Merton had dispatched an express with these lines to Stafford Lodge, who had been obliged to proceed to Clifton; a delay had of course been occasioned, and Miriam had hardly strength or reason left to enable her to write a few lines, inclosing this letter to Henrietta, to explain the reason of her detention at Mrs. Stafford's. But ever mindful of her friends in the midst of her own sufferings, our heroine knew that Henrietta's perplexity on the subject of Merton would now be done away; and she felt the kind consideration for her feelings which had restrained his pen.—Miriam had but just dispatched a servant to Sion Row, when she was alarmed by a violent ringing of Mrs. Stafford's bell;—she rushed up stairs: there what a sight was exhibited to her already disordered senses!—Mrs. Stafford was again seized with a violent vomiting of blood; she
could

could not articulate—she seemed not to recollect any one around her. It continued incessantly for two hours; medical assistance was of no avail; and after a faint struggle, the once beautiful and blooming Emily lay an inanimate corpse!—Miriam fell into a fainting fit by the side of the breathless body—all sense forsook her; and when she again opened her eyes, she was surrounded by her father, Mrs. Lester, and Henrietta. For several days she continued in a very weak state; her limbs would scarcely bear her across the room, and her eyes were constantly blinded by tears. Mr. Seymour had been actively engaged in performing the offices of friendship for Mrs. Stafford. The unhappy husband was almost broken-hearted: the fatal news reached him as he was sitting at his nephew's bed-side.

Youth, a good constitution, and a heart at ease, soon did wonders for Stafford: for

while his sorrowing uncle breathed into his ear his forgiveness, his blessing, he whispered some other intelligence, which appeared to be equally exhilarating. The physicians who attended Stafford, ordered him to the Hot Wells. Think you, my fair readers, he opposed their commands? Ah! no; his heart, his soul were there already! Merton thought it would be proper for him to accompany his friend, and he felt that it would be happiness!

Mr. Stafford could not resolve on making one of the party; his great soul refused consolation, and he retired to the solitude and the study of Stafford Lodge; yet he wrote a letter to Miriam, and his noble offers to Mr. Seymour shewed that, in the establishment of his nephew, he considered both his family and his virtue, and that Stafford's choice was approved by him. Nor was Mr.

Seymour backward in providing for his daughter's. Little, my gentle readers, do you know of him, if for a moment you can suspect it.—Henrietta too, the daughter of his adoption, in parting with her to Merton, she was not forgotten or neglected.—And now we will turn to a new page, and finish our *petite histoire*.

CONCLUSION.

I TAKE up my pen for a few minutes, *not* to describe wedding dinners or wedding dresses, so we will suppose that the marriages have already taken place.

Mr. Seymour purchased Tunacombe Castle of Fitzpatrick, (indeed he received it as part of his debt); and in modernizing and improving the old building, with the advice of his four children (as he now called them), he spent the greatest part of his time. From its vicinity to Menrooth, it was particularly
pleasant

pleasant to him ; and his health was sufficiently restored to enable him to live there in the summer, where he was constantly accompanied by Stafford and his beloved Miriam.—In winter he paid a visit to Bath, and quaffed health from the (to him) salubrious waters. Then our heroine and her Lord visited Stafford Lodge. Miriam was almost idolized by its honourable owner ; and in contemplating the happiness and the virtues of his young relatives, Mr. Stafford felt a serene pleasure.

Mrs. Lester seemed to ward off the attacks of old age ; her health and her looks brightened with her lengthened years ; and she soon affectionately loved the husband of her niece.

Henrietta and Merton never regretted the day which threw them into the same stage-coach, which is saying a great deal for the matrimonial state.

To

To a mind sanguine as that of Mortimer, a disappointment of the heart was acutely felt; and though time enabled him to think of our heroine only with respect and esteem, yet he never forgot her advice, and steadily pursued the path of reformation, begun under her auspices: and the end of two years saw him united to an amiable woman, whose acquaintance and friendship were much prized by Miriam.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick never returned to England; and happy would it be for our island if it were completely cleared from *all* its domestic incendiaries!

The moral of this little work I leave to be developed by *old* gentlemen who take unto themselves *youthful* partners; and by those avaricious souls, who not content with their own just gains, contrive to enrich themselves

felves still further by robbing the widow and the orphan!—To *such* I would say, that sooner or later there will be a day of *retribution*: and to the unhappy victims of oppression and persecution I would whisper, that there is one above, who hears the orphan's plaint, the widow's moan!

F I N I S.



DANE, MINERVA PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

Just published;

THE VALLEY OF COLLARES;

OR THE

CAVERN OF HORRORS,

IN THREE VOLUMES, 12MO.

Price 10s. 6d. sewed.

